DECEMBER 1959 35 c

THE saint®

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

edited by
LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE SAINT & THE CLEANER CURE

stories by

C.S. FORESTER

POUL ANDERSON

ANTONIO HELU

WILLIAM O'FARRELL

RANJEE SHAHANI

Two years ago on this page I made the mistake of asking for information about a Patron Saint of thieves, and the resulting flood of suggestions from our erudite readers cost me many working hours to acknowledge.

I had originally intended to follow up that inquiry with another about the Patron Saint of writers, but having learned one lesson I decided it would save time in the long run to do my own research, which in my dilatory way I just recently got around to. I am now happy to inform you on good authority that we scriveners are offered the protection of two sanctified guardians:

1) St. Lucy, whose feast is celebrated on the 13th of this month, a 4th-century damsel about whom little seems to be known except that she was born of noble parents in Syracuse, Sicily, and took a vow of virginity which so annoyed a disappointed suitor that he denounced her and got her executed.
2) St. Francis de Sales, whose feast is January 29, was born in Savoy in 1567 and took a vow of celibacy in his late teens. His best known work was called *An Introduction to the Devout Life* (1609), and he died peacefully in 1622.

It is a little puzzling that only one of these seems to have been interested in writing at all, and even his great book was not exactly a best-seller. The one thing they seem to have in common is their dedication to chastity, which is not generally believed to be a characteristic of writers.

But some Saintly miracle must certainly be required to unite such disparate authors as we have culled this month, from C.S. Forester with his brilliant sidelight on the historic plot against Hitler to Ranjee Shahani's illuminating of a female opportunist in Hanoi, from Mexico's own dean of detective writers, Antonio Helu, to our home-grown and science-fiction-reared Poul Anderson, whose PYTHAGOREAN ROMAJI launches a brand-new San Francisco private eye of whom we shall be printing much more.

As for me, I am humbly grateful to all Saints and all kind patrons.

Cleve Cartmill

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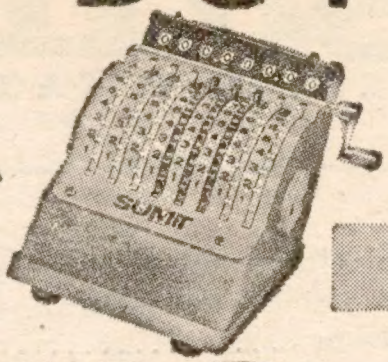

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I'd like to give this to my fellow men...

while I am still able to help!

I was young once, as you may be—today I am older. Not too old to enjoy the fruits of my work, but older in the sense of being wiser. And once I was poor, desperately poor. Today almost any man can stretch his income to make ends meet. Today, there are few who hunger for bread and shelter. But in my youth I knew the pinch of poverty; the emptiness of hunger; the cold stare of the creditor who would not take excuses for money. Today, all that is past. And behind my city house, my summer home, my Cadillacs, my Winter-long vacations and my sense of independence—behind all the wealth of cash and deep inner satisfaction that I enjoy—there is one simple secret. It is this secret that I would like to impart to you. If you are satisfied with a humdrum life of service to another master, turn this page now—read no more. If you are interested in a fuller life, free from bosses, free from worries, free from fears, read further. This message may be meant for you.

by Victor B. Mason

Out of the thousands who read this message perhaps only you and a few others will have the vision and the intuition to realize that it may be intended that you read this page at this time—that the coincidence of holding this magazine in your hands may shape your destiny, may guide you to lots of independence beyond the dreams of avarice.

Don't misunderstand me, I am not speaking of mysterious laws of nature that will sweep you to success without effort on your part. That sort of talk is **rubbish.** If this message is intended for you, you are the kind of man who knows that anything worthwhile must be earned. If the earlier development of your karma has revealed to you that there is no reward without effort, you may now be ready to learn and use the secret I have to impart.

Please don't misunderstand this statement. I am not a philanthropist. Frankly, I am going to charge you something for the secret I give you. Not a lot—but enough to convince me that you are a little above the fellows who merely "wish" for success.

I have two businesses that now pay me all the money I need. One of them is unusual in two respects: 1) It is needed in every little community throughout this country; 2) It is a business that will never be invaded by the big fellows. It is essentially a one man business and can be operated without outside help. It is good summer and winter. It is growing each year. It can be started in spare time on an investment so small that it is within the reach of anyone.

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There is not enough space here to tell you the full story, but if you are interested in becoming independent in a business of your own, in knowing the sweet fruits of success as I know them, send me your name. That's all. Just your name.

I will send you the facts that will enable you to check up on the opportunities in your own community and then if you decide to take the next step, I will allow you to invest $15.00. Even then if you decide that your $15.00 has been badly invested, I will return it to you.

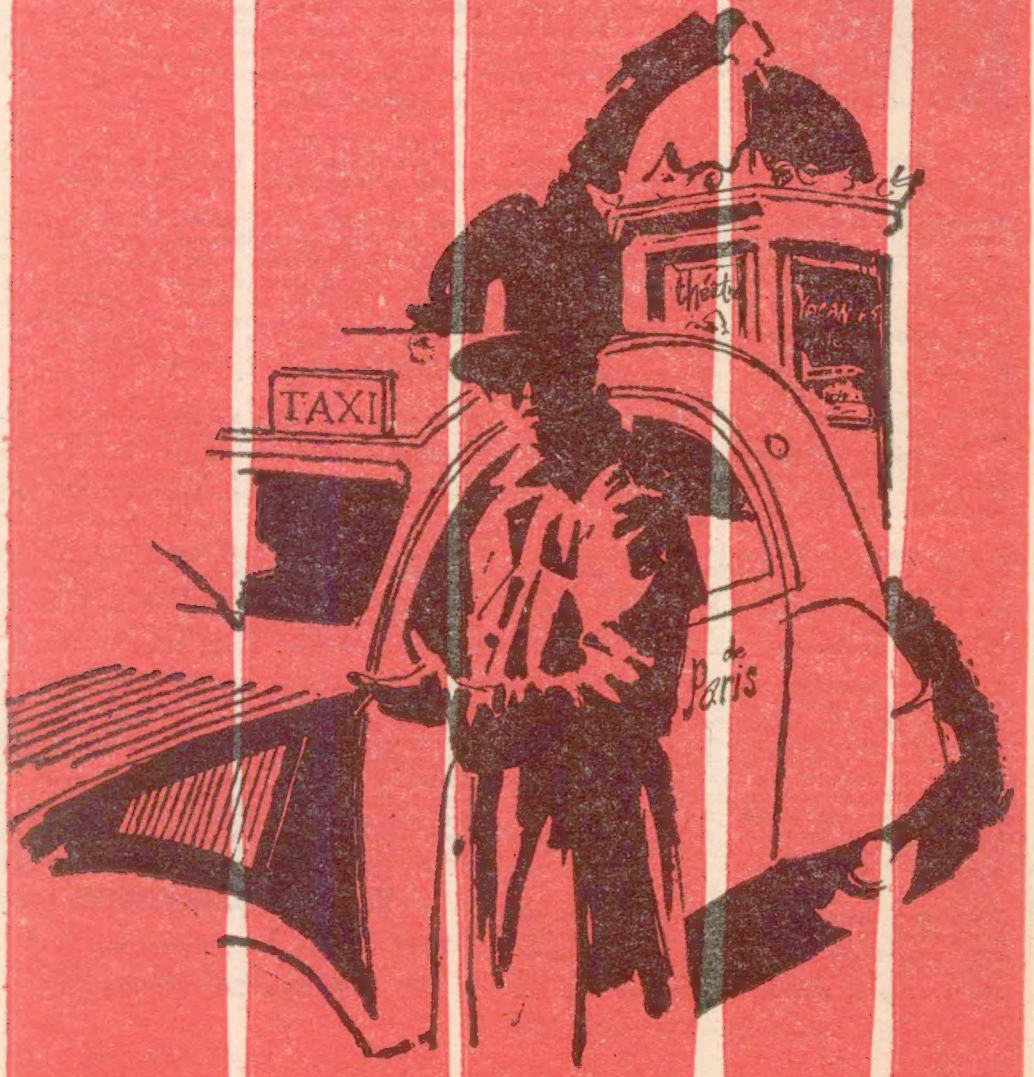
There's no coupon on this announcement. If you don't think enough of your future to write your name on a postcard and mail it to me, forget the whole thing, but if you think that having this message come to your attention may be a coincidence that is more deeply connected to your destiny than either of us can say, then send your name. No salesman will call on you. I will write you fully and you can then make your decision in the privacy of your own home.

VICTOR B. MASON

1512 Jarvis Ave. Suite M-169-P

Chicago 26, Illinois

The Saint And The Cleaner Cure



SIMON TEMPLAR suffered neither fools nor pests gladly, but he was never too stubborn to admit that even the most obnoxious person could have something to offer him that might be useful at some remote time in some odd way.

He did not like Dr. Wilmot Javers, whom he met at a cocktail party in London for which the occasion has no bearing on this story, but he talked with him. Or, rather, he listened and made a few conventionally encouraging noises while Dr. Javers talked.

"I came across a case recently that would interest you," Dr. Javers stated, in a tone that defied contradiction. "I said to myself at the time, this would be one for the Saint."

"Did you?" responded the Saint politely.

"Of course, I never dreamed I'd have the chance to find out whether you could solve it. But now you'll have to show me whether you're as clever as they say you are."

"I couldn't be," Simon responded promptly.

But Dr. Javers was not to be diverted. As a medico, he may have been extremely competent and conscientious, sympathetic and indefatigable in affliction, dedicated to his profession and his patients; but as an individual he was one of those opinionated and aggressive types that can only assert themselves by reducing somebody else.

There are physical specimens of the same mentality who, with a certain reinforcement of alcohol, upon spotting a former or even current boxing champion in a bar, are impelled to try their best to pick a fight with him—an occupational hazard of which every career pugilist is acutely aware. What can they lose? If he declines the challenge, he is yellow. If the loud mouth can score with a sneak punch, he can boast about it for ever. But if the pro gives him the beating he deserves, then the champ is nothing but a big bully picking on a poor helpless amateur. Even actors who portray tough-guy parts before movie or TV cameras, merely to support their wives and children, are the recurrent target of hopped-up heroes who feel inspired to prove that these actors are not as tough as the script makes them.

The Saint was exposed to this psychosis on two planes —not merely the physical, but also the intellectual, which in several ways was harder to

cope with, requiring more patience than muscular prowess. But he had learned to roll with the abstract punches as well as the other kind.

"Here's the situation," said Dr. Javers. "The subject is a man thirty-eight years old married, two children, more than averagely successful in business. Never had a serious illness in his life, but is somewhat overweight. His business calls for a lot of expense-account wining and dining. His only trouble is that the wining is often too much for him. He isn't an alcoholic, and he holds it like a gentleman, but he goes to bed drunk two or three nights a week, regularly. I mean, when he lies down, it's a fine question whether he falls asleep or passes out."

"So?"

"One night, after taking a foreign buyer out to dinner and a couple of night clubs he comes home and goes to bed in his dressing-room, as he always does when he's out late. His wife is an understanding soul, and she doesn't wait up for him. The next day, he has the usual hangover, only it's much worse than usual."

"Must have been an extra big night."

"He has the splitting headache and the nausea, of course, but much worse than he can ever remember having them. And a bad cough though he can't r e m e m b e r whether he smoked a lot more than his normal quota of cigarettes. Naturally, he has no appetite for breakfast. But he doesn't improve during the day. He feels worse all the time, he can't eat, and his eyeballs turn yellow. The following day, his wife thinks he must have an attack of jaundice, and calls me in. By that time he has stopped passing urine. I do what I can, but in two days he is dead."

"Another casualty to the expense-account system," said the Saint. "His wife ought to sue the Government for instituting a tax s y s t e m that forces business men to entertain each other to death just so they can have a little fun with their profits before the tax collectors grab for them."

Dr. Javers frowned. It was evident that on top of everything else he disapproved of flippancy, at least when it detracted from the importance he attributed to his own conversation.

"I'd given him a complete check-up only three weeks before. His social-b u s i n e s s drinking hadn't been going on long enough to do any irreparable damage. His liver and

kidneys were still in good shape. He showed no signs of any cardiac condition. In fact, I would have testified anywhere that there was nothing organically wrong with him."

"Anyone can make a mistake, I suppose."

"Not me, Mr. Templar. Not that bad a mistake. In fact, to protect my own reputation, it was I who urged that there should be a post-mortem. The subject's wife agreed, and I was completely vindicated. He had absolutely no chronic lesion or disease. If he had watched his diet, cut down his drinking, and taken a l i t t l e exercise, there was no reason why he couldn't have lived as long as any of us. But he died, actually, of acute kidney failure."

"So he was poisoned."

"O b v i o u s l y. But what with?"

"I don't know. I didn't do it."

"I'll give you a little help. It was done with something that anyone can buy without any restriction, which you'd be likely to find in almost any house, and which isn't generally considered poisonous at all. And generally speaking, it isn't. This poisoning was a freakish accident. It depended on an entirely separate circumstance which I included in my summary, if you were paying close enough attention.

Simon made a heroic effort to mute a sigh.

"I'm no toxicologist, doctor," he said. "You tell me."

"I'll give you one more clue," Javers said, with visibly expanding e g o c e n t r i c glee. "There was a heavy smear of lipstick on the collar of the coat he had worn on his last night out. But he insisted, and I believe him, that this was merely a souvenir of the floor show at one of the c l u b s to which he had taken his customer, which had one of those numbers where the chorus girls make fools of some of the men at the ringside tables."

The Saint shrugged.

"I give up."

Javers shook his head, and his round smug face shone with delight. In any sensibly ordered world, no further justification should have been needed for punching him in the nose.

"Oh, no, you don't," he said. "You still haven't really tried. I want to find out how good you are. T h i n k it over for a while."

He moved away, chortling to himself, leaving Simon unexpectedly unhooked and joyfully free to set a course to-

wards a prettily molded blonde in another corner whom he had been wistfully watching for some time.

Needless to say, the Saint did not think about Dr. Javers' conundrum for a moment; but Dr. Javers was not so easily dismissed. An hour later he came all the way across the room to buttonhole Simon relentlessly again.

"Have you found the answer yet?"

"No," Simon said patiently. "What is it?"

The doctor beamed at him gloatingly.

"You haven't concentrated on it yet. I know, I've been watching you. Unfortunately I have to leave now, but I'm not letting you off so lightly. I'm going to leave you with the problem. It'll torment you later, when you're trying to go to sleep or waking up in the morning. And when you can't stand it any longer, you can call me." He handed Simon a card. "We'll have a spot of dinner together and I'll explain it to you. Or if you happen to have hit on that solution, I've got a few other scientific puzzles for you to sharpen your wits on. I expect I'll hear from you one of these days."

He departed again, chuckling fatly; and Simon put the card in his pocket and took a mental pledge never to look at it again or to waste another instant wondering what chemical coincidence Dr. Javers' patient could have succumbed to.

Experience should long since have taught him the intrinsic danger of such rash resolutions, but he felt that in this case at least there was nothing he could obtain from such an odious bore that would be worth the tedium and irritation of getting it. He held firmly to this erroneous assumption for several weeks, during which he was fully occupied with other matters that are recorded elsewhere in these annals, which left him no spare time to fret over tricky puzzles that did not immediately concern him.

The nudge of Destiny was still far from perceptible at first, one night in Paris when he came home very late to his suite at the George V, giving a perfunctory *bonsoir* to the anonymous cleaning woman whom he passed on her knees in the corridor. But he had hardly taken off his coat and tie when there was a timid touch on the buzzer at the outer door, and he opened it and recognized her more by her drab fatigue uniform than anything else.

"May I speak with Monsieur a moment?" she asked nervously.

"But certainly, *Madame,*" he replied cordially, in the same French, giving her the ceremonious title which Gallic gallantry may accord even to the humblest servant.

She came in, a gray woman toil-worn to nothing but skin and bones and indefatigable persistence, yet with a great dignity in her large deep-set eyes.

"I know who you are, Monsieur Templar," she said, when she had shut the door. "Everyone talks about *le Saint* staying here. I have waited many nights for the chance to catch you at a good moment."

"What is your trouble?" he asked.

"It is a long story, but I will try to make it short. My name is Yvonne Norval. I had a husband once, and his name was Norval, so that is also the name of my daughter Denise. But he died long ago, in Algeria, after the Liberation, which did not settle everything for the professional soldiers. Denise is almost sixteen now, and she was born the day after I was notified of his death."

"A small consolation, perhaps. But it must have been hard for you to bring her up alone."

"Very hard, Monsieur. The pay of a French sergeant is not much, at the best, and the pension of his widow is even less. But we had waited a long time for a child, always promising ourselves that if we were blessed with one it should have the best upbringing that we could give it, at any sacrifice. For neither of us had had much, but there must always be a time when any family can improve itself, if the parents are determined to pass on to their children a little more than they received. And after I had lost my husband, this hope became an obsession. I was already twenty-seven years old when Denise was born: I had had the best of my own life. But I still had a good figure and a pretty face, though you would not believe it now."

It was hard to realize that simple arithmetic made her no more than forty-three. Anyone's guess would have pegged her at least twelve years older. But the Saint said: "On the contrary, *Madame,* one sees that you must once have had great beauty, and now it has only matured, like a good wine."

"I had, at any rate, something that men still wanted,

for a little while," she said calmly. "And since I no longer had any use for it, I gave the benefit to Denise."

"*Je vous ecoute,*" said the Saint. "Please sit down. At an hour like this, I have nothing but time."

This was a poetic exaggeration, but on this occasion he did not feel that the time was wasted.

The tale that he heard might have sounded to a cynic like the plot for a soap opera that no soap manufacturer would dare to sponsor, but it was told with a stoical dispassionateness that gave it a quality of classic tragedy.

Yvonne Norval had chosen the oldest profession with no illusions, solely on her cold-blooded estimate that there was no other in which she was qualified to earn so much money so quickly. But unlike most of her sisters in it, she had hoarded every franc that she could. She spent nothing on personal luxuries, and no more than the essential minimum on such decorative vanities as were necessary to attract her clientele; her spartan willpower and singleness of purpose substituted for the expensive stimulus of drink and drugs which many others depended on to numb their self-disgust; and with the cunning and ferocity of a tigress she evaded or fought off the approaches of the pimps who would have helped themsevles to the largest share of her income. She did not say it all in those words, but the facts were implicit in her own austere way of telling it.

In seven years of this rigorous dedication, she had expended the last saleable vestige of her original stock-in-trade, but she had accumulated a fund that would guarantee her daughter's care and education for the next ten, on a much higher level even than she could have hoped for if a *fellagha* sniper's aim had been a little less deadly.

She placed the child in a convent s c h o o l of excellent standing, representing herself as the widow of an Army officer whose snobbish family had sternly refused to recognize their marriage or its offspring. Too proud to plead for the charity of these intransigeant in-laws, she was depositing everything he had left her to prepay the raising of their daughter in the style to which she should be entitled: the fact that she herself would thus be forced to take any menial job for her own subsistence was not to cloud the c h i l d h o o d of Denise. When the little girl became

aware enough to ask why Yvonne visited her so seldom and never took her home, she would be told that her mother was married again, to a man who was so intensely jealous of the past that he refused ever to see the fruit of it; perhaps one day he would relent, her mother was working on him constantly, but the day had not dawned yet. The sympathetic nuns had agreed to lend their silence to the deception.

"They would have needed a very tolerant confessor themselves," said the Saint, "if they had not been moved by such a sacrifice as yours. But after this, did you still have more trouble?"

"Like you, Monsieur, I thought it was ended. But if it had been, I should not be talking to you. Instead, it was only beginning. After all, there was a *maquereau* I did not escape."

His given name was Pierre, and in the half-world where he belonged he was known as Pierrot-le-Fut—a gross arrogant beast of the type that are loosely called *Apaches*, but not because there is anything noble in their savagery. Of surnames he had a variety; but once when he was picked up in a police dragnet it had amused him to call himself Pierre Norval—that same day, Yvonne had refused his "protection" for the nineteenth time, in particularly graphic phrases, and under the influence of a stolen bottle of Calvados it had struck him as a brilliantly subtle retaliation. Even afterwards, he was still entranced with his own malicious genius, and continued to use the name, grumbling obscure crudities about his unfaithful "wife".

In a psychological reaction that has afflicted many better men, rejection had not quenched his interest but had inflamed it. He did not think for an instant that she was irresistible or irreplaceable, he knew a dozen girls who were prettier or better built or more entertaining, but that abstract estimate made it an even more intolerable affront to his vanity that Yvonne should turn him down. It had become a point of honor that he must subjugate her, so that in his own time he could humiliate her as she had humiliated him. And to this objective he had devoted more tenacity and ingenuity than he would ever have squandered on any legitimate enterprise.

And when he finally found the key, it fitted more perfectly than he could have hoped for in his most vindic-

tive imaginings.

"Somehow, he found out what I had done with Denise, and how I had paid the school so that she would be safe no matter what became of me. Naturally, I had let no one know about the money I was saving. And now there was no way for him to touch it. But he had armed himself with the one weapon that I could not fight. He told me that unless I became his slave, he would wait until Denise was old enough to be destroyed, and then tell her all the truth about herself and about me."

For a few seconds the Saint was utterly at a loss for words, and in that silence he realized that no comment he could have made would have been adequate. In a lifetime that had been lived as close as possible to every form of evil, he had never heard a blackmail threat of such callous enormity.

Finally he said: "You should have killed him."

"You are right. But that is easier for most people to say than to do, especially for a woman. And if I had done that, even the nuns might have turned against me. The whole scandal might have come out. And even if I escaped the guillotine, I could no longer have hoped to help Denise a little more, perhaps, after she left the school—to see her sometimes and perhaps not have her hate me altogether for giving her up to satisfy the new jealous husband I had invented."

"So you had to accept Pierrot-le-Fut."

"Yes. I accepted him. I had a little time left in which men of a lower class, or drunk enough, would still pay for me. And even after that, he would not let me go. He had not yet satisfied his hate. He kept me as his cook, his servant, to wait on his friends and their girls and to clean up after them. And to bring home enough money to pay for this privilege, I could go out and work as a scrub woman also, as you saw me tonight."

Simon thought this must be the end of the story.

"You have my sympathy and my homage, *Madame*," he said. "But that cannot be all you wanted of me. Tell me what you think I could do."

"I would not have troubled you, Monsieur Templar, if only what I have been doing was enough. I am used to the work now, and to the beatings when he is drunk, and I am still able to hold back a little money which he does not know about, which I am sav-

ing for when Denise will need it. But now, Pierrot threatens something much worse than before."

"Can there be such a thing?" asked the Saint incredulously.

"Yes. Now this filthiness says that what I do is no longer enough. He has been watching Denise. She is old enough and pretty enough, he says, to profit him much more than I can, in the one trade that he understands."

Simon Templar would never again claim that he had heard everything.

"But what threat could he use to make *that* possible?"

"He may not need one. He can find some way to shame her at the school, by telling the truth about me to her, or to her friends, or to their parents. Then, when she is an outcast, by them or by her own shame, he will take over, by force if necessary. He and his kind know only one art, but they know it well. And because I tried so hard to have her gently brought up, she will have none of the defenses that I had. Pierrot-le-Fut is not stupid, you must understand, but he is utterly ruthless, and he is obsessed with one idea which has become a mania. For him to reduce and ruin Denise would be his last and greatest triumph."

"And, of course, there is no bribe left to offer him. He has had the satisfaction of making you suffer the last possible indignity. Now he can only look forward to the sadistic climax of proving that all your sacrifice was in vain."

"*C'est ca.* One believes, now, that the Saint understands everything."

"That's one thing I'll never do," said the Saint. "But I'll keep trying."

He lighted a cigarette and stared out of the elaborately lace-curtained windows through which he could see practically nothing, listening to the vague rumbles and beeps and blended voices and sporadic clatters of the city without hearing them, and wondered if some miracle would ever earn him a reprieve from the reputation to which he had dedicated himself.

He could no longer have been flippant about soap operas, but he was beginning to think that a magnificent soap opera could have been built around him, except that hardly anyone would have believed the plot material except himself.

"Tell me some more about this charmer, Pierrot-le-Fut,"

he said.

The details he was mainly interested in were the haunts and habits of the specimen. He wrote down certain addresses that Yvonne Norval gave him, and when he had finished asking questions she stood up with quiet dignity.

"I apologize for taking so much of your time, Monsieur," she said. "But since you have heard it all, may I dare to hope a little?"

"I will try to think of something," he said. "But whatever happens when you leave this room, you must forget that you ever spoke to me, or told me anything. This may be our last meeting; but in any case, we never met."

"C'est entendu, Monsieur le Saint."

It was the most natural thing for him to offer his hand as he opened the door for her, but he was somewhat stunned and embarrassed when she bent over it and touched it to her lips. Then, before he could protest, she was gone.

It was quite a while since the Saint had tackled such a relatively basic and elementary problem as this. Regardless of the visions of starry-eyed spiritual or psychological idealists, he had never believed in the redemption or rehabilitation of such creatures as Pierrot-le-Fut: he believed in one fast, thrifty, and final cure for what ailed them, a treatment which eliminated all risk of a relapse. The fact that he had not administered this remedy so often of late was not due to any loss of faith in the efficacy of death as a disinfectant, but to the distracting pressure of too many more intriguing and more profitable claims on his attention. He realized now how much he had missed some of the old simple pleasures. But it had taken a pustule of such almost incredible stature as Pierrot-le-Fut to remind him of them.

The next evening he headed for the area near Montmartre which was frequented by the self-baptized Pierre Norval and his ilk, not to sample any of the garish *boites* clustered around the Place Pigalle where pilgrims from all over the world pay their traditional respects to the symbols of mammalian reproduction, but to sift through some of the unglamorous outlying cafes where the parasites on the by-products of this activity met to scheme, drink, boast, connive, gamble, and trade every kind of illicit merchandise—vegetable, mineral, and human. And without

any elaborate disguise, using only a few of those subtle shifts of dress and demeanor which were his own inimitable masterpieces of camouflage, he was able to do it without ever incurring the kind of attention that would have greeted an o r d i n a r y tourist who had strayed so far from the time-honored tourist trap-line.

He found Pierrot-le-Fut quite quickly, at the third of the addresses he had jotted down, an unattractive *bistro* off the Boulevard Clichy, and without evident nausea he sipped some extraordinarily foul and bitter coffee while he browsed s l o w l y and exhaustively through the same edition of *Match* that he had mauled through each of the other stops he had made.

His purpose at that time was no more vital than to satisfy a student's curiosity to observe this excrescence with his own eyes, to verify certain aspects which Yvonne Norval's prejudice might have distorted, and to make a few observations of his own, in much the same way as a professional executioner discreetly assesses the weight and musculature of the man he is to hang.

Pierrot-le-Fut was a big man, built somewhat along the lines of the barrel which was only one of the possible meanings of his sobriquet; but in spite of his tubby shape he also looked hard as a cask is hard. He had small piggy eyes and a sadistic mouth from which a loud voice blustered mechanical obscenities. He had a flushed face and an equally ruddy nose which bespoke other habitual intemperances. He drank cognac from a large glass which was frequently refilled, and although it did not seem to be having any devastating effect on him at the time, this was still early in the night's probable span for him.

From what he saw and overheard, Simon Templar decided that the picture that had been drawn for him was not exaggerated, and he paid for his noxious coffee and folded his magazine and went out. The entire excursion would hardly have been worth mentioning in this anecdote at all, if it had not been for the totally unexpected complication which it unluckily led to.

The Saint had only walked a block or so along the Boulevard Clichy, and caught the attention of a prowling taxi, and discussed his destination with the chauffeur according to the protocol established by modern Paris taxi-d r i v e r s

(who must first be assured that the travel plans of a potential passenger fit in with their own, which they almost never do, which calls for a special bonus above the metered fare to be agreed on to compensate the driver for the inconvenience) when there was a nudge at his elbow and he turned, with a standard formula of polite but firm rebuff ready on the tip of his tongue. But instead of the painted or the pandering nonentity that he expected, he looked into a mournful emaciated-spaniel face that he knew only too well, for it belonged to Inspector Archimede Quercy of the *Police Judiciaire.*

"You will permit me to ride with you?" said the Inspector, making the question mark barely perceptible. "The George Cinq is not far out of my way, and it would be agreeable to rest my feet."

"But of course," said the Saint, with a delighted geniality which he did not feel. "After all the jokes I've made about that occupational malady of policemen, it's about time I did something to alleviate it."

In the cab, he closed the glass partition that separated them from the driver.

"And which of the nude spectacles have you been checking on?" he continued quizzically. "I had no idea it was one of the duties of the *Police Judiciaire* to go around making surprise examinations of show girls' costumes, to catch anyone trying to chisel a millimeter off the legal minimum of eight centimeters tapering to four."

"And I," said Quercy, with the utmost composure, "had no idea that the Saint was interested in such canaille as Pierrot-le-Fut."

Simon's bantering gaze did not waver, in spite of the leaden feeling that sagged within him as his premonition was so bluntly confirmed.

"Then how did you acquire this extraordinary notion?"

"Purely by observation. I give you my word, I have not been having you watched. By accident, I happened to see you in a cafe as I passed. I was about to cross the street to speak to you, when I noticed that in certain small ways you were not comporting yourself as I am used to seeing you. These were not things that would have caught the eye of anyone else—indeed, they were things that would help you to escape attention. It was clear, then, that you did not *want* to be seen."

"Which naturally made you

want to see."

"It is a professional instinct," said the other calmly. "You soon left this first cafe and went to another, which was equally unlike the kind of place where one is accustomed to find the elegant Simon Templar. But again, you were trying not to appear elegant. And since you did not trail anyone there, it became evident that you were looking for someone. This was substantiated when, after a while, you walked to the third *bistro,* again not following anyone, again t r y i n g to efface yourself, and again devoting yourself to a magazine which I had already seen you read twice."

"It's a pity it was so absorbing, or I might have felt you breathing down my neck."

"Obviously it had not occurred to you that anyone might be f o l l o w i n g you: therefore you must believe that in this affair, whatever it is, you have all the initiative."

"Did Emile Gaboriau get any of his inspiration from you?"

"He could have, but I was not so old then...*Eh bien,* at last you discover Pierrot-le-Fut. He does not recognize you, and you are not wearing a false beard, so one deduces easily that he is not aware of your interest in him. But although you hardly exist for anyone else, you can be so skillful at submerging yourself on the rare occasions when you choose to, it is *you* I am watching from my concealment outside. I suspect you identify him from a picture or a description that has been given you, since it is manifest that you have never met, and the identification is ratified for you when his friends call him Pierrot. I see you studying him closely from behind your magazine, for a long time, until you seem satisfied and you leave."

"And what makes you think I was looking for this Pierrot character, out of all the others I must have looked at while you were spying on me?"

"You did not look at any others in the same way. And after you had finished studying him, you left, and you did not try any more bars. You hailed this taxi and asked to be taken to your hotel. When I heard that, I knew that you had accomplished your object, at least for the present, and I allowed myself to intrude on you."

Simon threw back his head and laughed almost inaudibly.

"If you don't qualify for some sort of award, I'll have to institute one for you," he

said. "What would you think of calling it the Prix Pouiet? ... Now, let me tell you. I've had such a bellyfull of some of these elegant places where one is accustomed to find me, as you put it, that I had an overwhelming urge tonight to go slumming. I wanted to sit in some dull dives and look at some drab characters of the type that I sometimes ran into in the bad old days. Obviously I had to try to make myself inconspicuous, or at least not too much like an American tourist. But things don't seem the same way as they used to seem. Or maybe it's me who is getting old. But I sat in a couple of joints without finding anything to be nostalgic about, and then in the last one there was this Pierrot, a survival from what seems like another era. I watched him for a while, and concluded that he was no longer amusing, only a gross bullying pig. I decided to stop trying to recapture the past and return to the soporific civilization of the Champs-Elysees."

Quercy nodded sympathetically.

"I understand you perfectly," he said. "And therefore I have to warn you that although Pierrot-le-Fut is without doubt a pig of outstanding swinishness, the responsibility for slaughtering him must be left to a French court and the authorized machinery of the State."

"When do you think they will get around to it?"

"That is not for me to predict, Monsieur Templar. But after this, if anything violent should happen to Pierre Norval that cannot instantly be attributed to his e q u a l l y abominable associates, I predict that I shall be obliged to investigate every possibility that it was an act of the Saint."

"Do you mean," asked the Saint incredulously, "that you don't believe me?"

The Inspector rubbed his sad sunken jowls forbearingly.

"We have been through more than one case together, and I have learned a great respect and fondness for you, *mon cher ami*. But I do not forget the record which was the first thing I had to study about you, and I do not think you have quite overcome all your bad habits—especially when you mock a serious *policier*."

They had arrived at the hotel. Simon got out, and said with unabated impudence: "Must we make it such an early night? How about bring-

ing your tape measure and we'll walk over and process the G-strings at the Crazy Horse Saloon?"

But Quercy shook his head and remained in the cab.

"*Merci.* I am too comfortable now, so I shall ride the rest of the way home. But I beg you, do not forget what I have said. For I shall not forget."

"Everyone should have his beautiful memories, Archimede," said the Saint.

But upstairs in his suite, he paced the floor for half an hour before he could relax enough even to lie down on the bed.

The wild coincidence that Quercy had chanced to spot him in the first cafe, and had deployed such unexpected talents for analytical observation, had transformed with one malign stroke what should have been a virtually kindergarten exercise in meritorious homicide into a disconcertingly serious hazard.

The Saint was even less inclined to allow Pierrot-le-Fut to continue to pollute the universe than he had been when he set out for Montmartre that night; but he had no intention of losing his head over the project, figuratively or literally—and Inspector Quercy had made the latter possibility much too explicit for complacency.

The mopping-up of Pierre Norval would have to be as clean a job as the Saint had ever engineered.

It was not until he was horizontal, but still tussling frustratedly with the problem, that he had a sudden dazzling recollection of certain cocktail party that the pompously infuriating Dr. Wilmot Javers.

There was a BEA flight to London at 11 o'clock in the morning which he was able to catch with no indecent scrambling, and thanks to the anomaly of Daylight Saving Time he arrived in England a little earlier than he had left France. He called Dr. Javers from the first telephone he could reach at the airport, and was fortunate to catch him at his office.

"You remember, you warned me your puzzle would haunt me," he said, with shamelessly hypocritical humility. "I didn't believe you at the time, but eventually it did. But I simply don't have the technical knowledge to solve it. Anyway, this being the first time I've been back here since you gave me that headache, the top-priority item on my list is to get you to put me out of my misery."

He could hear the man's jocund gurgle of self-satisfaction.

"I remember our little talk perfectly. And I think you've suffered enough. Can you dine with me tonight at my club? It just happens to be the evening I keep free for my scientific reading, but for an occasion like this the *Medical Journal* can wait!"

Dr. Javers was just as unctuously patronizing when they met, and malicioulsy refused to be the first to bring up the reason for their meeting. Simon out-waited him through two Dry Sacks and a lot of small talk, and finally had the minor satisfaction of forcing the other to advert to the topic after they had sat down to dinner.

"So you couldn't stand it any longer, eh? You admit that was one mystery that stumped you?"

"You can have it in writing if you like. But don't make me rack my feeble brain any longer."

Dr. Javers took his time, sipping a spoonful of soup and savoring it deliberately along with his moment of triumph.

"The subject was poisoned by carbon tetrachloride—otherwise, the commonest kind of cleaning fluid."

Simon stared at him, blinking.

"I thought that was supposed to be harmless. Unless he drank it. But I'm positive you never gave me any hint that he might have done that."

"I didn't, and he didn't. The clue I gave you was the lipstick stain on his coat. Although it was comparatively innocent, he probably thought it would be better to get rid of it than have to explain it to his wife. He got out a bottle of this cleaner and started to work on it. But, being in the condition he was, he knocked the bottle over and split what there was in it. After that, he gave up and went to bed."

"But if a few fumes like that can kill someone, from something that everybody uses, why aren't people dropping dead all the time?"

"It's a wonder it doesn't happen more often. Everyone thinks carbon tet is harmless, but that's because it doesn't catch fire or explode. The fumes are quite poisonous—a concentration of five thousand parts per million, with an exposure of only five minutes, can cause damages that may be fatal after a week's illness. That is, about a quart of fluid vaporized in a small space like the dressing-room where the subject slept."

"Do you mean he was using a whole quart bottle of cleaning fluid?"

"Certainly not. But neither was he exposed for only five minutes. That's why the average user gets away with it—even if they're leaning over the thing they're cleaning and inhaling lots of fumes, they don't do it for long. The subject slept in this small room for more than four hours. In that length of time, a few ounces could have fatal results. And on top of this, there was one other factor which I was careful to emphasize."

Simon figured that he had eaten his humble pie, so he was no longer obligated to play guessing games.

"Which was that?"

"Now, really, I should have thought any detective would have spotted that one. I refer to the fact that the subject had been drinking heavily. For some reason which is not yet fully understood, alcohol sharply reduces the ability of the liver and kidneys to detoxify carbon tetrachloride. So that for a person who is under the influence, the probably lethal dose can be cut by about thirty per cent. Put these factors together, and you can calculate that it didn't take any extraordinary amount of fluid to kill the subject I told you about, in the circumstances I described."

The Saint thoughtfully finished his soup, enjoying it every bit as much as the doctor had enjoyed his, and considered various angles while the traditionally venerable club waiter was replacing it with a plate of delicately browned *sole meunière*.

Then he said: "Perhaps it's just as well more people don't know all that, or there might be a whole rash of mysterious murders."

"Don't you believe it," Javers said scornfully. "Carbon tet evaporates, yes, but it isn't undetectable. Any good pathologist would recognize the effects at once, from the way it dissolves the fat in the body organs—just as it dissolves grease spots from your clothes. So any murderer who was planning to use it would have to be damn sure it could be taken for an accident. And that's the problem with practically any other poison, as you must know."

Simon nodded respectfully. He could see no flaw that would be a handicap to him.

He knew that his subject slept in a small room and went to bed well marinated in alcohol every night; and he could safely assume that Pierrot-le-

Fut slept with the shutters tightly closed, like the average Frenchman of his class, in defense against the deleterious miasmas of the night. He also knew the hours during which Yvonne Norval would be scouring and vacuuming the corridors of the George V, consolidating any alibi she might ever need.

Dr. Wilmot Javers, flicking bright gloating glances at him between dissecting operations on his *sole*, thought he could read the Saint's mind like a book.

"Of course, *you* might have been able to get away with it, for one of those so-called 'justice' killings they say you did in your young days, where there was no obvious motive to connect you with the victim. It's too bad you couldn't think of it for yourself then. It's too late now, because if I read in the paper about anything that sounded as if you'd made use of it, I'd feel morally bound to go to the police and tell them how I might have given you the idea. I don't approve of people taking the law into their own hands."

Simon Templar was able to smile beatifically. Fate, true to its kindly form, had finally paid its indemnity for the time and irritation that this odious coxcomb had cost him.

To make one more flying visit to Paris under another name, avoiding all places in the category of the George V, and wearing some simple disguise that this time would obviate the risk of accidental recognition by Archimede Quercy or any of his ilk, would present no great difficulty to the Saint. And he felt reasonably confident that the unspectacular demise of a low-echelon Parisian hood like Pierrot-le-Fut would not rate any space in the English press.

"Good heavens, chum," he protested. "Everyone knows I gave that up years ago."

INDECISION

by C. S. FORESTER

THERE WERE medal ribbons across the Baron's chest, and there was a cross hanging from his buttonhole, and he wore the epaulets of a major general, but what was more important was that he wore crimson stripes of the General Staff. Even to someone who did not know the Baron personally that would be the most important thing about him; anyone with good fortune and bulldog courage might rise to be a major general, but it called for much rarer qualities to be appointed to the General Staff. To pass the rigorous tests necessary, a candidate had to be blessed both with brains and a capacity for hard work, and furthermore a suitable combination of these two, for a high proportion of either one would not compensate for a deficiency of the other. A certain quality of character was necessary too; not merely an unremitting diligence, but a selfless kind of diligence that prompted the candidate, regardless of his own future, to devote all his efforts to making the German General Staff the finest in the world and the army that it directed necessarily the finest in the world as well. The watchful people in high positions in the General Staff were always on the lookout

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for men with these qualities, and whoever was discovered to possess them was promptly rewarded, not necessarily with promotion, although that might be incidental, but with work and more work, responsibility and more responsibility. One other factor was desirable yet unnecessary, and that was noble descent. Plenty of people from bourgeois families had risen to high rank on the General Staff, but it helped to be of blue blood, and the Baron's blood was the bluest of the blue. That was why he was called *the* Baron, when there were thousands of barons in the army of the Reich; he had been called that ever since he was a subaltern, and although it was a nickname conferred by the accident of birth one could be prouder of it than of some of the other nicknames which had begun to be whispered in the ranks, like the "Hitler Youth General," or the "Yes General," or the "Lackey General."

It was many years ago that the Baron had passed into the General Staff. He was aging now, and it was certain that he would retire (if he lived long enough) with no higher rank than his present one. He would never carry the baton of a field marshal; he would never even be a full general because he had been found wanting in other qualities. For a brief interval he had been entrusted with the command of a division in the field, and it had soon become apparent that he did not possess the bloody resolution, the dash, and the infectious personality necessary to a man commanding fighting forces; the staff needed him, and the field army emphatically did not. He had been brought back and re-established in his office, where he could do work that few others could do, and thereby influence the operation of the army, for good or evil, far more than any general commanding a division—more than any general commanding an army corps, or even an army, for that matter.

Because the Baron was a man with a remarkable brain; it would have been remarkable in any man, and it was quite astonishing to find such mental powers in someone of blue blood. To anyone unacquainted with the conventions that ruled the German Army, it would be still more astonishing that the man with such a brain should go about with a shaven bullethead that gave him a brutish

look, and with a single eyeglass screwed into his right eye to flavor the brutishness with an appearance of vapidity.

There could be no doubting his powers, though. As a subaltern, the Baron had enlivened dreary evenings in the mess by impressive little demonstrations—he could run swiftly through a pack of fifty-one cards and announce without hesitation which was the missing one. Long and complex tables of establishments were as familiar to him as the buttons of his uniform; admiring—and exasperated—subordinates used to say that he knew every nut and bolt necessary for the equipment of an armored division, and the weight of every tool allocated to a bridging company. With this remarkable memory was combined a logical and mathematical mind that could calculate the ultimate resultant from a host of converging factors.

It was in consequence of these abilities that the Baron had been in charge, for a long time, of the military management of the railways—the most complex and sensitive section of all the work of the General Staff. From Bordeaux to Warsaw, from Copenhagen to Rome, not a train moved without an order for which the ultimate responsibility lay with the Baron. It was a task that gave full play to his co-ordinating abilities. He had to bear in mind not only the permanent factors, like the shortage of coal and of rolling stock, and the necessity of keeping the mine traffic ceaselessly on the move, but also the constantly fluctuating factors, such as the damage done by Allied air raids and the repairs that had been effected. The bottleneck of Ulsen, the complexities of Ham; he had been familiar with those for years, and at the same time he had always at his fingertips the details of the military demands of the Eastern front; for it was he who directed the torrent of men and materials thither—the torrent that like a river losing itself in the desert poured in that direction to evaporate amid the fiery heat of war. At one and the same time he might be faced with the demand for routing a couple of army corps to Bessarabia and the necessity of evacuating the civilian population of Hamburg, and it was the Baron's business to see that the two operations were economically performed even if fog or snow or flood came

unexpectedly.

Today—a flaming summer day, although he was hardly aware of the fact—he had some delicate problems to solve. He sat at his desk in his office thinking them out. The walls were covered with maps, but he did not have to refer to them; they were there so that he could illustrate his orders to his subordinates, or explain to other generals not as logistically minded as he the incompatibility of their several demands. A very large troop t r a n s f e r e n c e had to be planned, for Fuehrer Headquarters was now coming round to the idea that the Anglo-American landing in Normandy was a serious invasion and not a mere feint designed to bring about the evacuation of some other sector of the European coast. If Fuehrer Headquarters did not change its mind—as it often did—the correct action to be taken would be to gather up all available divisions and fling them upon the invading army, to scrape together every man, every gun, and every tank that could be spared from other duties, to move them across the continent with the utmost rapidity, and to strike with the utmost force before the Allies could build up their strength.

There were German divisions in France not yet engaged; von Rundstedt and Rommel and Fuehrer Headquarters were deep in a triangular argument about the advisibility of moving them, and where. The Baron had to calculate the chances of whose opinion would prevail —and then he had to superimpose the chances of the Allied air actions allowing those troops to move by rail at all. Yet allowance had to be made for rolling stock in case of sudden demand. Other things were more easily calculable; there were divisions earmarked as a mobile reserve in Norway and Denmark and Friesland, and even here in the environs of Berlin; pitifully few after the disasters in the East, and yet enough to make it a tricky business to thread them all through the network of worn-out railways already carrying as much traffic as exhausted equipment and p e r s o n n e l could handle. The problems involved were of exactly the type to suit the Baron's mind, and he was devoting himself to them with something of pleasure, and with the disinterestedness of a surgeon performing a delicate operation. The patient's wife might be

sitting in the waiting room weeping, waiting for the result, but the surgeon would give her no thought. The Reich might be torn to pieces, but that was not the Baron's business at the moment; he had to concentrate on moving certain divisions in a certain direction.

Moreover, there was a small but unusual complication. Mussolini, *il Duce,* was on his way to pay a state visit to the Fuehrer. In extreme secrecy his special train was starting today, winding its slow way over the Brenner, carrying *il Duce* all the way across Europe from his puppet principality in Italy to Fuehrer Headquarters in East Prussia. Not only the secrecy but the precautions against assassination complicated the move. Routing train and pilot engine to an exact rendezvous with the Fuehrer, across the lines of communication of the struggling Central Army Group, called for careful consideration.

So the Baron was not too pleased when his office door opened and the Count came in. The Count was a lieutenant general, and a lofty figure at the Staff Headquarters round the corner in the Bendlerstrasse, and he was a lifetime personal friend as well; the pleasure of seeing him nearly counterbalanced the Baron's irritation at being interrupted in his work. But it was possible that the Count had suggestions to make, or news to transmit, or orders to pass on, with an actual bearing on the problems at hand. The opening question seemed to indicate this.

"You have seen the new Fuehrer order?" asked the Count.

"Directive 112? Yes, I've seen it."

"You're working on it now, I suppose," said the Count.

"Yes," said the Baron.

The count turned to study one of the maps on the wall, so that when he spoke again his face was averted, which might account for a stilted hollowness of tone in what he said next.

"I see the 98th Armored comes under your orders."

"Yes," said the Baron.

The 98th Armored was a division that had been nearly destroyed in Russia during the spring, and had been brought home to Parchim to be reconstituted, reequipped and remanned. It was almost ready for service now—Fuehrer Headquarters declared it quite ready and had detailed it for transfer to France.

"Are you routing it through

Berlin?" asked the Count, his face still averted.

"I haven't decided yet. But I don't expect so."

Wittenberge would probably be the better route, although there was something to be said in favor of Berlin with the Hamburg network so badly crippled and all those ammunition trains heading east.

"I see old Keil is in command," said the Count; he turned back from the map to face the Baron again.

"I didn't know that," said the Baron. "How is he?"

"Well enough," answered the Count.

Keil was an old friend, too, dating back to the days of the Kriegsakademie.

"His wife's hair is red this year," supplemented the Count, with a grin.

One half of the Count's face was less mobile than the other; the plastic surgeons had done amazingly good work after he had received that frightful shrapnel wound—there was no perceptible scarring, and they had given his face symmetry, but even their best efforts could not result in a completely natural appearance. There was something rather ghastly about his grin, which could hardly be due to the fact that they were talking about Wilhelmina Keil—Frau Generalleutnant Keil—whose amiable eccentricities were well known.

"What about Barbarossa?" asked the Count. "They are under orders too?"

"Yes," said the Baron.

"Fully equipped, I suppose? The cream of the new recruits? New Tiger tanks?"

"Of course," answered the Baron.

Barbarossa was an SS armored division, reconstituting itself in the same way as the 98th; the SS nowadays managed to secure the best of everything available. With its headquarters at Nauen Barbarossa it was within an easy day's march of Berlin.

"You'll be sending them first, then, I hope," said the Count. "Route them via Stendal. Give the old 98th a chance."

"The Tommies hit the railway bridge at Rathenow in the last raid. You ought to remember that," said the Baron. "It'll be three more days before it'll carry any traffic."

In ordinary circumstances it would be the natural route for the Barbarossa division traveling west from Nauen. As it was it would be more economical as well as quicker to send the 98th ahead through the bottleneck.

"I'd forgotten that," said the Count. It was remarkable how much concern he displayed over such a small detail as the relative times of arrival in action of the two divisions. "The road bridge is still intact, though. Send Barbarossa by road as far as the river. It can entrain on the far side easily enough—all the ramps in the world in the sidings there."

"That would be sensible," said the Baron. "But— You know as well as I do about the fuel situation."

Coal and rolling stock might be in desperately short supply, but motor fuel and oil were scarcer still. No conscientious staff officer would move an armored division by road when it was easily possible to move it by rail.

"Yes," said the Count meditatively. That wound of his certainly gave the oddest expression to his face. Then came a burst of candor. "You see, Baron, the first armor to arrive will undoubtedly go into Dietrich's corps. You know how old Keil stands with relation to Dietrich. Sepp will have him relieved in two days—out of uniform, even, perhaps."

SS General Sepp Dietrich was a hard man, and the Baron was vaguely aware of friction at some earlier period between Dietrich and Keil. It might be possible that Dietrich would take the opportunity of paying off an old score if he found Keil under his command. And Keil was, after all, one of the old army, while Dietrich was Dietrich.

"I see," said the Baron.

"Send Barbarossa through first—Sepp will be glad to have only SS troops in his corps. Then Geyr von Schweppenburg will have Keil and the 98th. Geyr and Keil are good friends."

"I would like to," said the Baron. "It's a pity about the bridge."

Even to do a good turn for Keil he could not issue orders that would mean wasting a whole day's fuel for an armored division.

"Tommy's air force!" said the Count. "Even Rommel couldn't escape them."

"Rommel?" asked the Baron.

"Good God! Haven't you heard? They got Rommel in his car two hours ago—he's badly wounded; doubtful if he'll live. Didn't you know? Von Kluge is taking over personal command of Army Group B."

"Rommel wounded!" said the Baron. The situation in the west might well be consid-

ered hopeless in that case. Rommel might have fought a good delaying action at least, but not fussy old von Kluge.

"You're so wrapped up in your damned trains," said the Count. "You have no thought for anything else. I don't believe you're human—I never have thought so. Even when we were young—"

"Rommel wounded!" repeated the Baron; his sick astonishment was proof that he was perfectly human. And yet, as regards his personal duty, it did not matter who was in command of Army Group B; what he had to do was to move the reinforcements earmarked by Fuehrer Headquarters into the sphere of command of the Commander in Chief west. Whether it was Rommel or von Kluge who handled them in action was none of his concern.

At this moment there was a distraction; Colonel Fink came into the room with a file.

"The Hamburg returns, sir," he said, and then, after a glance at the Count, "You've heard the news, sir?"

"About Rommel? Yes, I've heard it."

The Baron was already fidgeting with the file. He had been waiting for it before completing his plans; Rommel wounded or Rommel in good health, those divisions had to be moved. And even though the news was disturbing, that logistical brain of his was at work, adjusting time-tables one against another, and fretting because in the absence of the Hamburg data definite conclusions could not be reached. The Count had turned back to look at the map again.

"It's bad, sir," said Fink, and it was quite an effort for the Baron to realize that Fink was still talking about Rommel's wound, so rapidly had his mind reverted to its own problems.

"Undoubtedly," said the Baron. "I'll be ready to give those orders in an hour, Colonel."

"Very well, sir."

Fink withdrew, and the Count turned to face the Baron again.

"You'll route Barbarossa via Stendal?" he asked.

"I don't see how I can," replied the Baron, a little puzzled.

"Not even after the news?"

"I don't see how that affects it."

The Count looked round the room with a hint of desperation; half his face revealed his emotion while the other half remained wooden. Then he

looked round the room again; this time it was clear that he was not seeking inspiration but was making sure he would not be overheard. He came close to the desk and lowered his voice.

"Isn't this the time when we should try to save what is left?" he said in a low voice.

"If that were possible," said the Baron, puzzled that the Count should make such a point regarding whether Keil should come under Sepp Dietrich's command or not, but also guarded because the Count was clearly being guarded as well.

The Count stepped back from the desk again; his monocle slipped from his eye—ever since his wound he had found difficulty in keeping it in place—and dangled by its ribbon. He replaced it carefully; seeing him do so was infectious, like seeing someone else yawn, and the Baron put his own hand to his own eyeglass, which was a mere rimless lens, devoid of ribbon or chain, fixed apparently permanently under his almost hairless eyebrow—people used to wonder if he slept with it in place. It occurred to the Baron that they might be two members of a secret society making the society's secret sign to each other, and then he realized that there was a tiny piece of truth in the idea, for the single eyeglass screwed into one eye was the almost exclusive prerogative of members of the nobility attached to the General Staff—life would be hard for any bourgeois, at least until he reached the rank of full general, who ventured to wear a monocle. His brother officers would rend him with ridicule.

Fink came in again at this moment.

"Fuehrer Headquarters are coming on the wire, sir," he said. "The field marshal will be through to you in three minutes."

"Very well," said the Baron.

"Then I'll leave," said the Count.

The Baron rose and stood at attention, as was the due of an officer one grade higher than his own, even though he was a lifetime friend. Fink brought his heels together, and then, stiff as a ramrod, marched the two steps to the door to open it. The Count hesitated before he passed through.

"Remember what I said," was his last remark, and then he was gone.

The door had hardly closed before the telephone bell jangled, three times, abruptly, indicating that it was the left-

hand desk telephone to be answered, the one on the direct wire to Rastenburg. The Baron picked up the receiver and announced himself. At the same time he nodded to Fink, who hastened to the auxiliary desk at the far end of the room and picked up the extension there, spreading his notebook to record the conversation for the Most Secret pages of the telephone log of the Railway Headquarters.

Keitel's hard metallic voice was clearly recognizable.

"The Fuehrer has decided to leave the 202nd where it is," said Keitel. "But he will make the 409th available. All the other orders stand unchanged. Prepare the necessary routings—have you done so already?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Then do so at once. Those divisions must be on the move tomorrow morning."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall want a full report," went on Keitel. "Stauffenberg is flying here on the twentieth, the day after tomorrow. He can bring it with him. A full movement sheet and timetable. I want time to look through it before the Fuehrer Conference."

"Yes, sir."

"Staff officer, repeat those numbers."

"Two—z e r o—t w o," s a i d Fink into his telephone, with the greatest care in his diction to eliminate all chance of mistake. "Four—zero—nine."

"Correct. Good-by."

Fink and the Baron replaced their telephones.

"I'll confirm the move-warnings, sir," said Fink.

"Very well."

Now the decision had to be made; that should be simple enough, for the Baron's mind had had some hours now in which to put all the data in place. Five minutes should suffice for him to decide everything—the substitution of the 409th from Rendsburg for the 202nd from Tondern actually simplified the problem. He might as well begin to dictate the directives at once. A few rapid sentences, and a hundred thousand men and nearly as many tons of equipment would begin to roll towards the west, c u t t i n g smoothly and cleanly without turbulence across the vast stream of drafts and munitions flowing daily to the east. But there was the Count's suggestion to be borne in mind. Or to be dismissed w i t h o u t f u r t h e r thought. No officer with a strict regard for his duty would contemplate using up a day's fuel just to preserve

Keil from the attentions of Sepp Dietrich. The Baron had done little jobs often enough for those of his kind, but only when all the other circumstances had been in strict balance. When there was no concrete reason to prefer A to B, the Baron had naturally decided in favor of A when there was a "von" in front of A's name. Yet here there was a very concrete reason, and no friendship for Keil—not even that past but happy friendship with Wilhelmina Keil—could weigh against it. The strange thing was that the Count could ever have thought it could, that he should have expended the time and trouble of making a personal appeal. He had really been urgent about it, quite pressing.

It could be done, of course. If the Baron were to send Barbarossa by road across the river the keen minds at Fuehrer Headquarters—Keitel and Jodl—might dwell upon that clause in the orders for a moment, might spend one second questioning its advisability, but they would decide in the end—would decide at once—that the Baron could not be wrong; they would decide that his accurate judgment and weighing of all the pros and cons—whose significance they could not determine for themselves—must be relied upon. He could do it. He could move Keil through Berlin and Barbarossa through S t e n d a l. Then—then—t h e Baron stirred uncomfortably in his chair. Then there would be a moment when there were no SS armored troops, almost no SS troops at all, in the vicinity of Berlin, while Keil would be close at hand with the 98th Armored. An interesting point. Very interesting indeed. That would be on the twentieth of this month, the day after tomorrow. T h e twentieth? The day after tomorrow? That was the day when Stauffenberg was to make his report at Fuehrer Headquarters. Stauffenberg! The Baron moved again in his chair. It was something more than the heat that made the palms of his hands wet, so that he wiped them nervously on his handkerchief. Stauffenberg was of blue blood, like the Count. There were dozens of Stauffenbergs, all cousins —his own great-uncle had married into the family. But this was Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg, the fiery active member of the family, whose restless vigor had not even been curbed by the mutilations he had undergone after the explosion of a land mine in Africa. Stupid old Stieff

had mentioned once Stauffenberg's restlessness and discontent as well as his ability. And then there was the link with that other group, those odd people who, descendants of the fighting heroes of previous wars, debated ethics or dogma or theories of government, barely existing under the strained toleration of the Fuehrer—Moltke and Yorek von Wartenburg and those others of famous names. There were ties of blood, of common discontent, between them and Stauffenberg, and through Stauffenberg to the Count—and through the Count to Keil. He had heard that Moltke had been arrested a short time ago. The tension must be mounting to the breaking point. So was it just coincidence that on the day Stauffenberg was due to report personally to the Fuehrer the Count was trying to replace the SS troops in Berlin with an army division—and an army division under Keil's command? Coincidence? The Baron's hands were wet again. There were other discontented people in Berlin at this moment. There were Beck and Witzleben, who had held the highest positions in the army and had been retired. They still made appearances at the Herrenklub and at the ministry. Could it all be coincidence? What was it the Count had said when he was leaving this room a quarter of an hour ago? Something about "trying to save what was left." Did that refer merely to trying to save the army from further domination by the SS? The Count's expression, the Count's manner; had they been quite normal? Yes? No?

The Baron, sitting solitary in his office, found himself confronted with reality, more surely than if Death himself had stalked into the room to stand before the desk with his bones gleaming in the sunshine. Reality; the Baron was an office soldier, as his brief experience in the field had proved. Those divisions that he moved about on his maps were not assemblages of men, living men of flesh and blood, of lusts and aspirations, of loves and hates and personal happiness and misery. They were only "divisions," colored pins on a map. When a division became "battle-worn" that did not mean that ten thousand men had suffered agony and death; it meant that a pin of another color had to be stuck into the map instead. The Baron had drifted entirely out of touch with reality; perhaps that had been

an advantage during his tenure of the railway command. His remarkable mental powers had done nothing to keep him in the world of reality; actually they had acted the other way even when Stalingrad was lost; even when El Alamein was fought. But now he was face to face with reality again, reality so intense that he had to wipe the sweat from his hands and then from the hairless folds of the back of his neck. Death, agonizing and humiliating, might be awaiting him; the Baron had no illusions about the fate which an infuriated and frightened Fuehrer would deal out to anyone involved in a conspiracy against his rule. He had to decide what to do, and he had to decide quickly—Fink was waiting in the outer room for his orders. If he brought Keil's division down to Berlin he would be making a contribution to the success of the conspiracy—if there *were* a conspiracy. But the conspiracy still might not succeed. In that case there would be the strictest investigation, and his motives for ordering that particular move would never withstand Himmler's pitiless analysis.

It would be safer to issue normal orders. Safer—yes, certainly, for should the conspiracy succeed, should the regime be overthrown, he could always say that it had never occurred to him that the Count had any special motive in making that request regarding Keil. Yet if he brought Keil down to Berlin the presence of the 98th Armored might make the difference between failure and success for the conspiracy. The SS police would not dare move in that case, or if they did the 98th would exterminate them. The SS would be exterminated whether they moved or not; the streets of Berlin would run with blood —the Baron faced reality again.

If there were a conspiracy blood would run in rivers, in rivers if the conspiracy succeeded and in rivers if it failed. And some of it might be his own blood. Lives were at stake, perhaps including his own. Not lives represented by numbers written on a casualty return, either. The lives of the Satanic Fuehrer in the Rastenburg headquarters, of Keitel of the metallic voice, of Jodl and Himmler and Goebbels; those lives on the one hand, and on the other the lives of the Count, of Stauffenberg, of Beck and Witzleben, his friends. And his own life too; it was

strange how difficult it was to make that fine brain of his really think about that matter. The Baron forced himself to imagine himself being led before a firing squad; he forced himself to think of a sudden pistol bullet into his stomach which would leave him writhing on the ground in agony. He simply could not bear to think of such things.

The thought of something happening that would bring the present regime to an end stirred even the mentally insulated Baron to the depths; it aroused every emotion. Not only did it set his mind working fast, but it worked upon his bulky and lethargic body. He felt a quickening of his heartbeat and his respiration; he crossed and uncrossed his legs repeatedly, fidgeting in his chair. The thought was hideously attractive, like some female vampire of old legend. To end the agony through which Germany was passing; to save the army—the most vital institution of all Germany—not only from the Russians and British and Americans but from the Fuehrer and his minions; that was something to be longed for with all the passion of which the Baron was capable. But the danger was terrifying. Even to think of that demoniac personality at Feuhrer Headquarters made a man shudder. Inhuman, merciless—and cunning; facile in every shift and subterfuge, suspicious, savage; who would dare even to cross his path, let alone rouse him to the paroxysm of insane rage that would be the inevitable result of a move counter to his ideals, threatening his authority, imperiling his life? Torture and death would be the fate of everyone involved, and for everyone related by blood to them. That was something no one could face. The Baron's mind shrank away from such thoughts, just as it shrank away from the unhappy memory of his divisional command in Poland.

Save for that dreadful episode his life during Germany's agony had strangely been a satisfactory one; as military administrator of railways he had been doing a difficult job well, better than anyone else could have done it. His active logical mind had always been fully employed, and the moments of weariness had been made happy by the knowledge that he had made no mistakes, had wasted nothing, had kept his head clear in the face of myriad complications. Now he was like a chess master looking up from a study of the board to see that

the spectators were drawing daggers.

The door opened to admit Fink.

"The orders, sir?" asked Fink.

"Oh God!" said the Baron. There were drops of sweat on his face which he mopped off.

Fink glanced just sufficiently obviously at his wrist watch to remind his chief of the passage of time.

"Very well then," said the Baron, desperately. "I'll dictate them now."

On the afternoon of July 20 the Baron was at his desk as usual. It was an even hotter, more stifling day. His eyes were on the clock on the wall; he was looking at it as though mesmerized. The two hands were together, indistinguishable. It was an instant's calculation for his mind to work out that in that case it must be sixteen point four minutes past three o'clock. But the hands seemed to be not merely indistinguishable; they seemed to be inseparable. The minute hand did not seem to move, so slowly the seconds were passing. The Fuehrer conference was usually over by two o'clock. By two-thirty on most days, or by three at the latest, he received his telephone call from headquarters. Keitel or Jodl or one of the junior staff officers at O.K.W. would transmit him his orders, telling him of the Fuehrer's decisions as far as they concerned him.

The wide strategic gestures the Fuehrer had made on the map were translated to the Baron in the form of directives, and he had to translate those into logistic terms—one careless sweep of the Fuehrer's pencil might mean reversing the direction of travel of two hundred trains. It was hardly ever later than three o'clock that the first call would come through, and now it was sixteen point four minutes past three—no, he could call it seventeen minutes past three now. Had Stauffenberg succeeded in whatever it was he had planned—if he had planned anything at all? The Baron's hand went out to the telephone, and then he drew it back again. He could not trust himself; he did not know what to say over the telephone that would not commit him one way or the other. To telephone might imply a guilty foreknowledge, but not to telephone might imply exactly the same. How hot it was! His clothes were sticking to him. Now it was half past three; he would wait until quarter to four, and then he would telephone.

Here was Fink, agitated and excited; his hurried entrance started the Baron's heart pounding wildly. Fink hardly gave himself time to click his heels.

"If you please, sir—"

"Y—yes?"

"The Home Army has been alerted for immediate duty."

Then something had certainly happened.

"By whose orders?" The Baron hoped his voice did not quaver.

"Orders of the Commander in Chief, Home Army."

"You are sure of this?"

"I put a query through to the Bendlerstrasse, sir," said Fink. "The reply was 'all orders of the Commander in Chief, Home Army are to be obeyed.'"

"Who did you speak to?"

"Colonel von Stauffenberg, sir."

Stauffenberg! Back from Fuehrer Headquarters?

"You're sure it was he?"

"Oh yes, sir. I knew his voice."

"If those are the orders from the Bendlerstrasse then they must be obeyed," said the Baron at length.

"The Bendlerstrasse" was the universal term for the General Staff Headquarters, an eighth of a mile away from the Railway Headquarters. It was the source of all military authority in the absence of orders from the Fuehrer and O.K.W.

A knock at the door made both men jump. It was a junior officer, one of Fink's assistants, not privileged to enter without knocking.

"Fuehrer - Headquarters coming through on the wire, sir!" he said.

The Baron grabbed for the telephone; the receiver beat against his ear with the shaking of his hand. Fink took up the extension telephone.

"Who is that?" said the earpiece instantly, in the hard unmistakable voice of Keitel. The Baron announced himself.

"This is Keitel. You know my voice?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are to obey no orders from the Bendlerstrasse. None. You understand? None. And no orders from the Commander in Chief, Home Army either. Understand?"

"Yes—yes, sir. If you please, what has happened?"

"Nothing serious. You are to disregard all orders that do not emanate from me personally."

"Yes, sir."

The telephone went dead instantly, leaving the Baron and Fink staring at each other,

the instruments still in their hands.

"I don't understand, sir," said Fink. "Shall I get through to the Bendlerstrasse?"

"No. Yes. No."

It was an incredibly serious matter to be told to disregard orders; an army that did so would fall into chaos, would melt into a formless mass like a wax figure in a furnace. Keitel was the direct representative of the Fuehrer; but the Bendlerstrasse was the direct representative of the army.

That knock at the door again; the junior officer reappeared.

"The Bendlerstrasse on the telephone, sir."

"Who is it speaking?"

"Count von Stauffenberg, sir."

"Very well."

There could be no harm in answering the telephone; that did not necessitate obeying any orders that might come through on it from the Chief of Staff of the Home Army. The Baron and Fink picked up the instruments from their desks, and the Baron announced himself.

"Good afternoon, Baron," said the telephone. It was Stauffenberg's voice, of normal pitch and modulation—perhaps there was a touch of lightheartedness in it, as there often was. "No orders from Fuehrer Headquarters is authentic. You are not to obey any such orders."

"I—I do not understand."

"Field Marshal von Witzleben is now in command. The Reich is in danger and the army has its duty to do."

Witzleben! All possible doubt as to the existence of a crisis disappeared with that name. If there were such a thing as an opposition to the Fuehrer, von Witzleben would be at least the titular head of it. The mention of the name introduced another complication; Witzleben as Field Marshal was senior to Keitel. If any military precept applied in the present situation, a soldier would obey von Witzleben rather than Keitel.

"Did you hear what I said, Baron?" asked Stauffenberg's voice, as airily as ever.

"I heard," said the Baron.

"Quite likely you will receive contradictory orders from Keitel," went on Stauffenberg's voice. "Field Marshal Keitel has no authority. Is that quite clear, Baron?"

"Not—not quite."

"It is a clear, definite order. You are to pay no attention to anything Keitel says. Lakaitel's day is over. So

cheer up. Good-by."

The telephone went dead. If it were really true that the day of Lakaitel—the Lackey General—were over the army would rejoice. But clearly there was a clash in progress between the two forces, a clash that could only end in the death of every single supporter of the losing side. And it was impossible to guess from the data at present available which side would be the losing side. The Baron went back through his memory over his actions up to the present, and felt a momentary relief at deciding they had been entirely correct. But the Fuehrer was merciless—a creature without pity, with no more thought for his victims than a tiger. But Stauffenberg of the airy voice; he would be merciless too. That light manner concealed a will of steel and an unrelenting determination. The Baron thought of firing squads and torture chambers.

Then he recovered himself with the realization that Fink was still staring at him. The play of emotion over his face must have been quite obvious.

"Very well, Colonel," he said, making every effort to speak with the polite curtness he always had employed towards his deputy.

Alone once more the Baron could mop his face again, with the handkerchief that was more than damp. The heat was dreadful. So was the strain. And time had fled by on wings; now it was past five o'clock on a glaring, brassy evening.

The telephone buzzed on his desk, and he picked it up.

"Major Schimpf is asking for orders, sir," said Fink's voice.

"Who is he?"

"Chief of Staff to General Keil, sir."

Keil of the 98th Armored, the division which the Count had asked him to route through Berlin today.

"What does he want?" asked the Baron desperately.

"You had better speak to him yourself, sir," said Fink; he bleated the helpless reply like an old sheep. Yet even though he bleated, he acted; there was a click as the connection was transferred before the Baron could say more.

"What is it, Schimpf?" demanded the Baron as brusquely as he could manage.

"I am asking for confirmation of my orders, sir," said a voice in the well-trained accent of the General Staff.

"What are they?"

"They reroute the division via Berlin, sir."

"Where are you?"

"Wittenberge, sir. The general and I arrived by road and found these orders awaiting us by teletype."

"Where's your division?"

"The first train is due in half an hour."

"And who signs these orders?"

"Chief of Staff, Home Army, sir."

"Ah!" The Baron tried to make the monosyllable completely expressionless.

"It's a clear-the-road order," said Schimpf. "First priority."

That order, if obeyed, would bring the first echelon of the 98th into Berlin two hours from leaving Wittenberge. The whole division could be detrained and ready for action in the city—unless an Allied air raid imposed delay—before midnight. And only a few minutes ago the Baron had been congratulating himself that so far all his actions had been strictly correct. Now he was faced with the immediate necessity of taking sides, and Fink was listening on the extension. No! It was not quite an immediate necessity.

"Your first train due in half an hour, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll confirm or countermand those orders within that time," said the Baron, trying to pick his words with all the care he could. "Telephone again five minutes before your first train is due."

"But, sir! The priority—"

"That will do, Schimpf," said the Baron harshly, putting down the receiver.

The existence of a clear-the-road order between Wittenberge and Berlin would play havoc with the orderly flow of traffic. If it were going to be countermanded it should be done at once. Yet—What was he to say in twenty-five minutes from now?

The door opened to the sound of music. Light dance music! Fink was carrying in a portable radio.

"An announcement, sir," he said. "The minister—Goebbels himself."

"Very well."

Fink put the instrument down on the desk, and the two of them looked at it as it ground out a frivolous tune; it might have been a ticking bomb. The reddening sunlight was pouring in through the windows. The music stopped in the middle of a bar, and an expressionless voice announced the Minister for Public Enlightenment. There was no mistaking Goebbels's voice following immediately after, that excellent speaking voice,

impassioned or sarcastic, serious or sad at will. He wasted no time in getting to the heart of the matter.

"An attempt has been made on the life of our Fuehrer. He was very slightly injured, although several of his personal staff were killed or mortally wounded. His slight injury has in no way interrupted his performance of his onerous duties, and he is at present in conference with *il Duce,* Signor Mussolini, our devoted ally, who arrived at Fuehrer Headquarters immediately after the dastardly attempt. The Fuehrer will address his devoted people over the radio tonight at midnight, when we will all be able to listen to his beloved voice and will be able to renew our vows of eternal allegiance to Fuehrer, Race, and Reich. Our hearts go out to him in this solemn moment when we know that Providence has guarded him from a great danger, and we can rejoice to know that the dastardly attempt was the work only of a small group of disloyal officers of the General Staff, seduced from their allegiance by International Jewry. Now there can be an end to the rumors which the Jewish agents are circulating. We can all remain tranquil and loyal, paying no attention to any further attempts by International Jewry to disturb our peace and our allegiance, while we wait to hear that voice which we all know and love. We can all say, deep in our hearts, *'Heil Hitler! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!'*"

The blare of a band bursting into the Horst Wessel song followed instantly on Goebbels's last words, and the Baron and Fink were left, as so often before, looking at each other. Neither dared say a word, but the Baron's brain was hard at work. Undoubtedly that was Goebbels's voice. But if the Fuehrer were dead or under arrest Goebbels would be saying just the same things, playing for time while the Nazis gathered their forces to strike back at the army; it might be significant that the Fuehrer was delaying his broadcast until midnight, but then it might not. With Mussolini on his hands and with the most important speech of his life to prepare, Hitler might well need time. Only one thing was certain, and that was that the Nazis still had possession of the broadcasting station; it might be significant or it might not. Thank God he still had not committed himself, although —the Baron looked at the clock—the minutes were now

flying by.

The radio was still blaring, and suddenly through its din another noise was to be heard, a rumbling and roaring down below in the street, which until now had been so quiet. The Baron hurried to the window; Fink snapped off the radio and followed him. A long column of trucks and lorries was rolling along the street towards the Bendlerstrasse; looking down onto each, the Baron saw steel helmets, packed close together; the trucks were full of troops. At the machine guns mounted over the cabs and pointing out from behind were soldiers, braced and ready to fire. Soldiers! Not police, not SS, but soldiers!

"Wachtbataillon Grossdeutchland," said Fink, reading the badges.

"Brought in from Doeberitz, then," said the Baron.

It was one of the best of the battalions of guards, but the Baron had no knowledge as to who was its commanding officer. It occurred to him at that moment that if he had fallen in with the Count's suggestion it would not be one battalion in trucks, but Keil's whole division in tanks that would now be rumbling down the street. If—he looked at the clock again—in ten minutes' time he confirmed the Home Army's orders Keil would be here by midnight. It was desperately important to know if the battalion was acting under the orders of a living Hitler, or of a Goebbels fighting for his life with Hitler dead, or of von Witzleben the self-appointed Commander in Chief. Torture chambers and firing parties. The last truck in the column had vanished from sight now, round the corner to the Bendlerstrasse, and all was deathly quiet again. Time was passing. Torture chambers and firing parties! And then, clear and loud through the sultry stillness, came the sound of a volley, rifle fire, half a dozen rifles fired not quite at the same moment. That was a firing squad, an execution, in the Bendlerstrasse. The Baron started to look over at Fink and then changed his mind, he could not trust himself to meet anyone's eyes, and he looked at the ceiling instead. Now another volley. The sweat inside the Baron's shirt was icy cold. It was hard to think. Who was shooting whom? Was von Witzleben making an example of officers who had not come over wholeheartedly to his side? Another volley. Who had died then? Some SS spy or some friend

on the General Staff? God, another volley! There was a massacre going on.

A massacre! That settled it. Von Witzleben would not order a massacre in the Bendlerstrasse. If von Witzleben were in power there might well be a massacre at Goebbels's house in the Herman Goeringstrasse, or at the Gestapo Headquarters in the Prinz Albrechtstrasse, but not here. There was another volley, and another. Victims must be being dragged in rapid succession before the firing squads. Loud, shattering reports, announcing to the waiting city that order was being restored. There could be no doubt about it. Thank God he had not committed himself on the wrong side. Time was just up.

"Colonel Fink!"

"Sir!" Fink's heels came together with a click, his hands at the seams of his trousers.

"Telephone immediately to Fuehrer Headquarters. Tell them that the 98th Armored is entrained at Wittenberge ready for immediate transfer to Berlin if they think it necessary."

"Very well, sir."

Now the Baron could meet Fink's eyes with a steady glance. But as Fink put out his hand to open the door it opened to admit three SS officers, pistols in their hands.

"You are under arrest," said the leader, and the Baron submitted to arrest with an easy mind; it would not take long to clear himself.

"And why did you plot with the Count?" asked the Gestapo officer for the twentieth time.

"I did not! I did not!" said the Baron. "I swear it!"

The Gestapo officer nodded to one of his assistants, who opened the door of the cell and gave an order. Two hard-faced young men came in, dragging between them a wreck of a man, shrinking yet helpless. It was hard to recognize him as Fink. The two hard-faced young men propped him up between them, to face the Baron and the Gestapo officer.

"Did the Count come to call on the Baron in his office on the eighteenth?" asked the latter.

"Yes—oh yes!" said Fink.

"You saw them together?"

"Yes!"

"Did they look like conspirators? Did they?"

"Yes!"

"You interrupted them conspiring?"

"Yes!"

Fink had come in to find them both adjusting their

monocles— Oh God! The Baron remembered thinking that it might well have been a secret sign.

"Did the Count say anything as he left?"

"Yes!"

"What was it?"

Fink's pale gray eyes could not focus; they seemed to be unseeing as they passed over the Baron's face.

"What was it?"

"He said—he said—'Remember what I said,' he said!"

"Now, Baron, what was it the Count had said?"

"But I didn't do it! I didn't do it! You can look at the orders."

"What was it he asked you to do?"

The Count was dead, shot in the courtyard at the Bendlerstrasse. He could not be hurt further, not like the Baron. The Baron told, spluttering, about the Count's request to route the 98th Armored through Berlin.

"But I didn't do it. You can tell I didn't do it! I routed them through Wittenberge."

"So? Did it not occur to you, Baron, that one telephone call to Fuehrer Headquarters, or to Gestapo Headquarters here, would have nipped the conspiracy in the bud? Was it not your duty to make that call?"

The Baron swallowed hard. To his credit it simply had not occurred to him that he might have betrayed his friends. Surprise delayed his answer, which should have been pat enough.

"But that wasn't the reason I was asked. It was because—"

The Baron rambled on explaining the personal relationships between Keil and Sepp Dietrich and Geyr von Schweppenburg.

"Send a message to France to have General Keil arrested wherever he is, at the front or anywhere else," said the Gestapo officer to an assistant, and then he turned back to the Baron. "Now why did you hesitate before you answered my question, Baron?"

The questioning went on. All the pettinesses, all the shiftinesses, were revealed. Schimpf had telephoned from Wittenberge. Why had he not instantly been told that all orders from the Bendlerstrasse had been countermanded by Fuehrer Headquarters? Why that delay? Why? Why? Why? And Stauffenberg, the man who had tried to blow up the Fuehrer, the man who had flown back to rouse Berlin to rebellion, was a cousin of the Baron's. Was that not so?

"No!"

The Gestapo officer re-

ferred to a notebook.

"There was a marriage in 1878," he said, "between a Countess von Stauffenberg and—"

That was the Baron's great-uncle.

"I never thought about that for one moment," said the Baron.

No? And what about the Baron's membership in the H e r r e n k l u b? And what about—? The true and the partly true and the false, the relevant and the irrelevant—the latter strangely transmuted into matters of great importance—all were worked in together.

"No need for further questioning," said the Gestapo officer at length, in a patronizing tone. All his contempt for blue blood, for great mental powers, was evident in his words. These pitiful gentlemen of the General Staff who could not construct a water-tight conspiracy!

"You will appear before the Court of Honor tomorrow," said the Gestapo officer, and the Baron looked at him stupidly. His emotions were all exhausted now. There was nothing left in him. And yet his mind was still ticking over slowly. The Court of Honor would cast him out of the army, so that the People's Court that would follow would not suffer the pain of finding an army officer guilty of treason. The People's Court —a blaring judge, a jeering prosecution, an inevitable sentence, and then a slow hanging. He could have made that telephone call and betrayed his friends, or he could have brought the 98th Armored up to Berlin; but he had done neither.

EDITORIAL ASIDE.....

My personal apologies to our old friends and to the authors concerned for the snafu last month when the bylines for four stories were inadvertently omitted. It won't happen again.

WHAT'S NEW IN CRIME will be resumed next month.

AMONG OUR CONTRIBUTORS

POUL ANDERSON —

author of the recent PERISH BY THE SWORD, winner of Macmillan's Cock Robin Mystery Award, lives on the West Coast.

LESLIE CHARTERIS —

points out, apropos of THE SAINT AND THE CLEANER CURE, that Simon Templar had one infallible prescription for certain blots on the human race, but it *was* sometimes a problem to administer....

C. S. FORESTER —

one of the master storytellers of our time, the creator of Horatio Hornblower, has been credited with the capacity of Conrad, the ability of Masefield, and the adventurous spirit of Lever.

HARRY HARRISON —

is a frequent contributor to our companion magazine, *Fantastic Universe,* and to men's magazines.

ANTONIO HELU —

a pioneer in the genre in Mexico, began writing detective stories back in 1926. His translator, Professor Donald Yates, is an authority on the detective story in Mexico and a Professor of Spanish at Michigan State University.

WILLIAM O'FARRELL —

will of course be remembered, by all aficionados, as a distinguished writer in this field.

Dr. RANJEE SHAHANI —

a frequent contributor to *The Times Literary Supplement, The Spectator,* etc., etc., has been called one of the most beautiful stylists in the English language. Author of INDIA WITHOUT MAKEUP, THE COMING OF KARUNA, THE AMAZING ENGLISH, and of a biography of Mahatma Gandhi, he will be editing, in this country, a magazine to be called *Vigil.*

Pythagorean
Romaji

A RAINSTORM came out of the Pacific about seven-thirty that evening. For a while, the sky roared. Then the wind went elsewhere, but the downpour continued. It was still so heavy at midnight that Trygve Yamamura lost his way a couple of times, driving through tangled hill streets. When he finally reached his destination, Berkeley and San Francisco Bay were invisible below him. The gutters chuckled and gurgled.

Even for this well-to-do section, Hugh Swayne's home was large, rearing and sprawling. Yamamura went up a flagged walk to the porch. The door opened for him and light spilled out across the big lean body and long face he had from his Norwegian mother, the narrow eyes and thinning black hair of his father.

"Mr. Yamamura? Come in, please. I'm Rolt, the chap who phoned. Sorry to get you out of bed and all that, but this really is an emergency. Let me take your coat."

Yamamura considered the speaker. Dennis Rolt was tall and looked athletic. His features were regular and deeply tanned, a scarf filled the V of his tweed sports jacket, but the total effect was pleasant. "Go on in," he finished.

The living room adjoined the entry. It held more pictures than was fashionable nowadays, anything from a Hiroshige print and a van Gogh drawing to a Matisse original, but somehow they blended well. Otherwise it was dominated by bookshelves, whose contents looked read, and the honest vulgarity of an eight-foot Christmas tree.

A girl stood near the door. Though her brown eyes were tinged by recent crying, she remained pretty, slim and rather pale. She wore a black dress whose simplicity must have set her father back fifty dollars, and an antique cameo brooch. Yamamura paused. "Miss Swayne?" he hazarded.

"Eleanor Swayne." Her words came unsteady, so low that he could barely hear. "I ...it's kind of you to—"

"But wait till you get my bill." Yamamura grinned, hoping to inject some humor into the proceedings. It fell flat. He cocked interrogative brows at the very young man slouched in a chair.

"James Vincent!" The self-introduction was snapped out. Yamamura saw rumpled blond hair, a surly mouth, an out-of-date suit.

"I should have met you my-

self, at the front door, I mean," said Eleanor. "But, well, I— It's such a nightmare!"

Yamamura took out his battered briar. "Mind if I smoke?" She shook her head. Rolt sauntered in. Eleanor went to him, blindly, and clung to his left hand.

He looked at Yamamura. "Understand you're a judo man," he said.

"A little," said Yamamura, stuffing his pipe.

"More than a little, from Eleanor's account. What belt do you wear?"

"Fourth black," answered Yamamura, embarrassed.

"Pretty good! I'm second, myself. Took it up while I was in Japan this year. I'm a little rusty now, but maybe we can work out sometime, eh?"

Yamamura said quickly, "Let's get started. All I know so far is that a valuable piece of jewelry has been stolen, and you want a confidential investigation."

"Yah!" said Vincent from his chair. "A hundred years of developing scientific police methods don't mean a thing. We've got to call in some private eye oaf."

"Shut up!" yelled Eleanor.

Rolt squeezed her hand. She gulped and fought against tears. "That was uncalled for, Jim," said Rolt. The boy's mumbled response might or might not have been an apology.

Yamamura ignored the byplay. "You told me this diamond necklace was worth twenty thousand dollars, Mr. Rolt. Correct?" he said. Eleanor nodded. He struck a match and continued: "That's grand larceny. Mr. Vincent is right, the police should be called."

"I thought so," said Eleanor. "But Dennis pointed out —I mean—"

Rolt stepped in with a relieving calm. "Eleanor phoned me at my hotel when she discovered the loss. She spoke of the police, naturally. But I reminded her who the suspects are. She's the daughter of the house, I'm her fiance, Agnes Paley is her oldest friend, and Jim, here, was at least her guest tonight. An official investigation would mean runaway publicity." He crinkled his eyes in a smile. "Perhaps I'm a traitor to my own profession. Journalist, y' know. But I asked Eleanor if there were any good private detectives in Berkeley. And it seems all the Bay Area has heard of Trygve Yamamura. So...we're in your hands. If you can recover the necklace yourself, why tell the world,

and ruin the guilty person's life for one mistake?"

"Twenty thousand dollars is a lot of mistake," said Yamamura. "Tell me, is Mr. Swayne the legal owner?"

"Yes," said Eleanor. She had recovered a little poise. "But Dad and Mother are out tonight. They're seeing some old friends off on a cruise, and expected the party to last till all hours. If you could solve this before, before they come home—"

"It's up to Mr. Swayne what is done," said Yamamura. "But until he gets back, I suppose there's no harm in my sniffing around." He flowed into an armchair. "Let's all relax and get acquainted."

"I'll fetch drinks," offered Rolt. "Whisky for everyone?"

"Nothing for me, thanks," said the detective, wondering how much damage that did to James Vincent's stereotypes. He watched Eleanor settle herself nervously. Vincent lit a cigaret, still glowering. One ear and a fraction of Yamamura's awareness kept tabs on Rolt, to make sure the man did simply go to the kitchen.

"Now, then," he said. "I've heard Hugh Swayne's name, of course. One of our most successful contractors." He glanced around. "And a bit of a scholar, I see, with special interest in things Oriental."

"His parents were missionaries in Japan," said Eleanor. Background discussion was soothing her, as Yamamura had hoped. "He spent his first ten years there, and he's made visits since."

Yamamura judged her to be in some awe of her father. The necklace itself might mean less to her than the knowledge she had failed him by letting it be stolen. *If, to be sure, she hasn't lifted it herself. Insurance would reimburse the old man, and then she could sell the gewgaw stone by stone elsewhere.*

"You attend college back East, don't you, Miss Swayne?" he inquired. "Mr. Rolt mentioned something about that on the phone."

"Yes. Columbia. Majoring in drama. My junior year. I flew home for the holidays. Arranged to come a little early, because...well, I wanted time for my parents to meet Dennis and—"

"You met him in New York?"

She nodded. "This fall. He was just back from, oh, all over the world." Blushing, leaping to safer ground: "We arrived only today. Dad and Mother didn't expect us quite so soon, and already had this date tonight. They couldn't

break it without hurting their friends' feelings, and I didn't care to go with them. I mean, it's not my generation. And I've even lost touch with my own old pals. I was in Europe all last summer, you see. This will be the first real visit I've had in Berkeley for a year and a half. Anyhow, Dennis and I spent the afternoon here with Mother, and Dad came home to dinner, and afterward they left us to—" She stopped, quite red.

"Your own devices?" drawled Vincent.

"It wasn't *my* idea to invite you!" she flared.

"Whoa, there," said Yamamura.

"Actually, Dennis left with my parents," said Eleanor. "He's to be our house guest. Of course. But tonight, under the circumstances, well, he insisted on getting a hotel. My parents let him off there, and he came back later. Again on account of...appearances, we'd thought of having some of my local friends up for a get-together. But they're mostly students, you see, with exams before their own holidays. Only Agnes was free. She brought—" Eleanor grimaced.

"Me," said Vincent. "Senior at Cal, majoring in physics, poor but honest." The claim to poverty, at least, was reinforced by worn clothes and scuffed shoes. "Agnes and I had a date tonight, but nothing definite planned, so when Eleanor called, Agnes decided to come. I drove up here with her, and she drove me and Rolt home. I don't have a car. Rolt phoned me just as I was turning in and made me grab a taxi back."

"Which he paid for?" murmured Yamamura.

Vincent jumped up. "I don't have to take this guff!"

"I'm sorry. None of my business," said Yamamura. Inwardly: *Or is it? Immature, barely scraping along, and proud as Satan—* He decided to avoid a possible scene, and said as Rolt entered, "How about showing me where the necklace was kept?"

"With pleasure. This way." Holding his drink, Rolt conducted Yamamura through a dining room full of lithographs. The Swayne home seemed a veritable art gallery. "I hope Agnes Paley gets here soon," remarked Rolt. "She struck me as being level-headed beyond her years. Maybe she can smooth the ruffled feathers in there."

They went up a broad staircase. Yamamura flicked eyes at the other man. "Are you a

foreign correspondent?"

"Well, I've been a bit of everything. Spent most of this past year in Japan. Had a sort of roving commission with Reuters, though I'm American born." As Yamamura took the pipe from his mouth: "But don't ask me to say something in Japanese! I tackled it and bounced right off again."

"I sympathize," said Yamamura. "I'd have liked some practice. Most Nisei have trouble keeping up their Japanese. It's so foreign to Indo-European concepts. What did you do over there, actually?"

"Talked to people—nearly all educated Japanese speak English, you know. Gathered impressions. Tipped off the regular Reuters man when I scented a potential story."

"I see. Uh, you said you went in for judo. Did you ever meet Saiganji Mamoru—hey, what am I saying? I mean Mamoru Saiganji. Sometimes I wonder why only the Chinese have that sensible custom of putting the family name first. Anyway, he's a fifth-*dan* black whom I got to know when I was in Tokyo."

"No. My judo was all in Kyoto, whenever I happened to be— Ah." Rolt opened a door along the second-floor hallway. "Here's the master bedroom. The study should lie beyond, if I remember. This house is a labyrinth, and I was only shown around today."

Yamamura crossed the lavishly picture-hung chamber to the door indicated: a plain white one no different from two others which he supposed led to closets. Above a narrow stairway he found a garret, comfortably furnished as a study. A dormer window faced dark, sluicing rain; the roof was loud with water.

"Here." Rolt showed him a hinged panel, which had been swung back. It was covered by a Walter Keane painting, and when closed would not have been distinguished from the rest of the wall. Behind it was a niche with a little safe that also stood open, displaying some jewelboxes and a file of papers. "Hugh Swayne told me he sees no point in buying ornaments to keep in a bank vault. This safe is fireproof and has a burglar alarm. Not that any burglar would be likely to find it in the first place."

"Uh-huh. What's missing, besides the necklace?"

"Nothing, as far as Eleanor knows. Here's what happened. The older Swaynes and I left about eight. Eleanor was alone then; the servants live out. She opened the safe to get her

brooch, at which time she definitely noticed the diamond necklace. She's positive she locked the safe again and closed the concealing panel. That habit has been drilled into her. I came back in a taxi about eight-thirty, Agnes and Jim arrived a few minutes later. We spent the whole evening in the living room, talking, playing records, dancing a little, the usual. It broke up around eleven. After we'd left, Eleanor came up here to return her brooch before going to bed. Panel and safe were closed, as expected. But when she opened them, the necklace was gone. She called me at my hotel; I'd just gotten in. I called you and the others."

"Hm. Were all of you together *every* minute?"

"Well, naturally we all went out from time to time to get another drink or go to the bathroom or whatever. But no one was alone for more than five minutes at a stretch, I'll swear."

"So the thief used one such excuse to disappear, dashed upstairs, opened this, slipped the necklace into a pocket or purse, and returned to join the fun. Cool, man." Yamamura stared at the combination lock on the safe door. Its numerals ran up to fifty. "Know how to operate this?"

Rolt barked a short, not very cheerful laugh. "No. Only the three Swaynes do, and the thief." He lounged back against the wall. "Obviously, the crime was impulsive. As we were talking, early in the evening, Eleanor mentioned a code phrase her father uses to help him remember the combination. Just for fun, we all tried to work it out, but failed. Only...the thief didn't fail. He solved the riddle, sneaked up here to try his answer out, found he was right, and succumbed to temptation."

Yamamura nodded. "Better close this again." He did so himself. "And then show me around the entire house, will you?"

"What? But look here, I said there's an alarm circuit. No prowler could have—"

"Please, Rolt! If you don't mind."

Rolt surrendered. Yamamura went down the stairs fast and quietly, like a large cat. He checked the bedroom closets and bureau, and continued along the corridor. Eleanor's room was next, still oddly desolate after her absence, a pair of suitcases standing half unpacked.

"Are you still with Reuters?" asked Yamamura. He was opening drawers, glancing

through the contents, closing them again with experienced swiftness.

"No," said Rolt. "I quit and went back to New York a few months ago. Been taking a long vacation. Have to find something soon, now."

"I see.... Okay, I'm through here. Let's go."

They completed the second-floor search and moved on down. "What was that catch-phrase of Swayne's?" inquired Yamamura.

"Pythagorean Romaji," said Rolt.

"Huh?"

Rolt spelled it out. "As weird as most mnemonic codes." Grimly: "But one of those kids broke it."

"Or you did. Or Miss Swayne took the necklace herself. Don't get mad, I'm just giving you the outsider's viewpoint."

"Quite all right. But then maybe you can understand why we'd rather keep the investigation unofficial."

Yamamura continued in silence. The kitchen opened directly on a two-car garage which, at the moment, held only a Chevrolet. "The older Swaynes took the Buick," said Rolt. Yamamura checked the floor and the automobile. Nothing was wet. Having worked his way back to the entry, he looked in its closet. His own raincoat, and those which Rolt identified as belonging to Vincent, Agnes Paley, and himself, hung aglisten with water, but their neighbor garments were dry.

"If that's the whole house, as you say, then it's pretty clearly an inside job," admitted Yamamura.

"Yes. And obviously Eleanor can't have hidden—"

"I didn't make what you'd call a really thorough search. A place like this must have a thousand crannies." Yamamura re-entered the living room.

Its atmosphere was less strained. Vincent sat rather than slouched. Eleanor still looked as if someone she loved had struck her (which might be true) but she achieved a smile and said levelly: "Agnes Paley, Mr. Yamamura."

The girl, who must have arrived a few minutes ago, reached up from her chair for a firm handshake. She was dark and rather stocky, with harlequin glasses on a plain, pleasant face. "I've heard of you," she said. "This is a pleasure, even under these circumstances."

Yamamura felt bashfulness. "Thanks. You're an old friend of Miss Swayne's, is that right?"

"Yes. High school classmate. Though this is the first time we've seen each other in ages."

"And look what auld lang syne meant, as soon as her toy disappeared," muttered Vincent.

Agnes c h u c k l e d, unperturbed. "Jim's going through the socialist phase," she said. "He thinks everybody with an income above ten thousand a year has to be a Philistine, a fascist, or both."

"Oh, what's the use?" Vincent s l u m p e d again. "Go ahead, Private Eye. I suppose at that, you're less likely to frame me than the fuzz would be."

"I used to be on the Berkeley force myself," snapped Yamamura. He checked his temper. It was not judo, which means the Gentle Way. "Miss Paley, do you attend Cal too?"

"Yes. History major, Greek and Latin minors."

"What are you studying to be, an anachronism?"

Agnes smiled, not without sadness. "I'm also taking secretarial courses. In case I can't hold out long enough for a Ph.D."

"I take it, then, your family isn't, um, quite as well off as the Swaynes?"

"Hardly. My mother's a widow and— Oh, never mind. I know what you're thinking. But the Swaynes have been just about our closest friends. We'd come here and eat caviar, or they'd come to our apartment and eat wieners, and it never made any difference. I didn't take that necklace."

Yamamura eased onto a couch, knocked the ash from his pipe and rekindled it. "Well, let's see who did," he said to their tensing faces. "First I'd like to check Mr. Rolt's various assertions with the rest of you."

Having done so, he puffed for a moment before he resumed, l o w - v o i c e d: "The chance to commit this crime seems to have arisen during your conversation. I wonder if, between you, you could reconstruct exactly what was said by whom?"

"After all these hours and drinks?" s n o r t e d Vincent. "Haw!"

"No, wait, Jim." Agnes frowned in thought. "I believe we can. Think back. That Pythagoras bit was first mentioned when—"

"Yes!" E l e a n o r sat up straight, with quickening excitement. "I do remember. Agnes and I were talking about her studies. She mentioned something about, about being

very interested in...wasn't it the Oriental influence on classical Greek philosophy?"

Agnes nodded. Rolt said, "Yes, I remember too. Eleanor made some joke about her father having also m a r r i e d Greece to Asia—"

"What do you mean?" Agnes looked with a certain wistfulness at the crammed bookshelves. "That he's that widely cultured?"

"Oh, I was only thinking of a funny little phrase he invented to help him remember the combination on our wall safe. In fact, he had the combination set according to it." Eleanor took another sip of her drink and snuggled closer to Rolt.

"You mean where you keep that half million bucks' worth of jewelry?" said Agnes.

"Oh, hardly that much," said Eleanor, turning shy.

"Isn't it a risk, keeping such things in the house?" said Vincent.

"Not really," said Rolt. "I thought the same, but mine host showed me his arrangement today, when we happened to speak of jewels and he wanted to bring out an interesting item. The safe's hidden behind a picture, which in turn conceals a swinging panel. You'd never know it was there. Also, it has an alarm circuit. Reminded me of one night in Darjeeling—"

"Anyhow, he can afford the loss," interrupted Vincent. He seemed taken aback at his own rudeness and continued hastily: "What is this phrase?"

"Pythagorean Romaji," said Eleanor, as anxious for peace as he.

"Hey?" Rolt paused in the act of lighting a cigaret.

"Pythagorean R o m a j i," Eleanor repeated. "The lock has a four-figure combination, which Dad can use those two words to recreate. He has a poor memory for numbers, you see, though he's a whiz at arithmetic."

Agnes took off her glasses, held them to the light, and began to polish them. "Now that's interesting," she said. "You never told me this before, Eleanor. Even that time long ago when you opened the safe to show me the stuff, you made me face the other way while you dialed the lock."

"Like me today," smiled Rolt. "And very properly, too. It would be downright embarrassing to possess such information. That time in Darjeeling—"

"Pythagorean R o m a j i," mused Agnes. "What on earth was the man thinking of?"

"I don't know," said Eleanor. "He just mentioned it to

me once, when I was a kid. The words were odd enough to stick in my head, but I don't need any memory crutch myself and I never did ask how this one works. I'd forgotten all about it, really, till just now."

"Romaji, R o m a j i." R o l t rubbed his chin. "Yes, to be sure. That's Japanese transcribed in the Roman alphabet. But whatever does it have to do with Pythagoras?"

"Do you have a two-way English-Romaji dictionary?" asked Vincent. "I bet I can guess the system."

"Over there, with the other Japoniana," pointed Eleanor absent-m i n d e d l y. She was busy smiling at Rolt.

Vincent scrambled from his chair and fetched the book. "If numbers are involved," he said, "I'd think of the Pythagorean Theorem first. Maybe this includes a numerical example."

"Hardly," said Rolt. "If that were so, he might as well write the combination itself down someplace. No, he wants a means to figure it out in his own head whenever needed."

"Still—" Vincent riffled the pages. "Nope, no luck. How about *theorem,* though?"

Agnes had been looking past his shoulder. "Gimme that," she said. "You're on the wrong track."

"Vas you dere, Sharlie?" Vincent found the word he wanted, jotted it down on a notepad from his pocket, and scowled. Agnes took the dictionary and went back to her chair.

"What's your idea?" asked Rolt.

"Nothing particular, yet," said Agnes. "But there's more than a trigonometric theorem associated with Pythagoras. There's the whole mystical P y t h a g o r e a n brotherhood, which existed for centuries. The clue may be a word like *Crotona* or *metempsychosis.*" She found an entry, shook her head, and started hunting another. "Or even *beans,*" she added. "The Pythagoreans never ate beans."

"Hmmm." Rolt knotted his brows together. Vincent made calculations. Agnes t u r n e d pages and stared into space between readings. E l e a n o r shifted on the couch with g r o w i n g nervousness. The rain seemed to fall louder beyond the drapes.

"14, 12, 28, 35," said Vincent all at once. "Is that it?"

Eleanor started. "N-n-no."

"You could hardly expect her to tell you if you were right," said Agnes. "I'm afraid our little game is both discourteous and pointless."

"Okay, okay." Vincent figured for another moment, tore off his notesheet, wadded it and threw it in the blazing hearth. "To hell with this."

"Interesting," said Rolt as he emerged from his brown study, "but too deep for me, I'm afraid."

"M-hm," agreed Agnes. She returned the dictionary to its shelf and paused by the record player. "Anyone for dancing?"

"And is that absolutely everything?" asked Yamamura.

"Yes," said Eleanor. "Oh, yes."

"No other book was opened all evening?"

They affirmed it. Yamamura clamped teeth on his pipe and wandered to the shelves. He spent a minute with the dictionary, then padded to an encyclopedia, where he extracted one volume and stood reading. The silence thickened around him.

"What are you up to?" demanded Vincent at last.

"Checking on the Pythagoreans," said Yamamura. "I'm only a private eye, remember?"

Vincent gnawed his lip. Eleanor shivered and leaned toward Rolt, who stood behind her chair and looked bleak. Agnes lit a cigaret and smoked in short, hard puffs.

"I thought you knew Japanese," said Vincent.

"Uh-huh," said Yamamura. "But there are different systems of Romaji. I assume Mr. Swayne would use the one in his own lexicon."

Eleanor nodded. Yamamura went back to the couch and sat down.

"Now I'll try to figure out the combination," he said, most softly. "Tell me if I get it right, please, Miss Swayne. Your father will want to have the lock reset anyway." He laureled his head in smoke and stared past them all.

"I must know whatever the thief did," he murmured. "Um-m-m. *Pythagorean Romaji* is a clue. Not a very complicated clue, or it'd defeat its own purpose. I gather Miss Paley's ideas about beans and reincarnation led nowhere, right?" Agnes nodded, stiff in the neck muscles. "But what else might *Pythagorean* hint at? I looked it up, and saw that the Pythagoreans were a regular cult. Obsessed with numerology: said prayers to the number ten, for instance. Is there anything else odd about Pythagorean numbers? Well, yes, they have meanings. The Greeks didn't use ideograms for numerals, like us, but letters. *One* was written *alpha, two* was *beta,* and

so on. But this means that every number was also a word, and vice versa. A cryptic word, probably, unpronounceable in most cases—still, you can see how a mystical numerology might take off from there!"

Vincent had to try a couple of times before blurting: "You mean *Romaji* makes the combination?"

"I doubt it," said Yamamura. "We only want four figures, not six. No, I think *Romaji* simply indicates something Japanese. What? Well, as long as we're dealing with numbers, why not Japanese numbers? Surely, with his background, Mr. Swayne can count in that language. Now the first four numbers are *ichi, ni, san, shi.* There are other forms which might be used, but let's try those as being the simplest."

His lips moved as he counted on his fingers. Rolt began to pace. Eleanor's eyes never left Yamamura. In a minute, the detective asked, "Is the combination 29, 23, 34, 36?"

Eleanor could barely nod.

"Faith and mercy!" exclaimed Agnes. "I don't get it."

"If Pythagoras had used the Roman alphabet, what would *ichi* have meant to him?" responded Yamamura. "*I* is the ninth letter, *c* the third, et cetera, so *ichi* comes out nine, three, eight, nine. Since I'm told Mr. Swayne is good at arithmetic, he need only add those to get 29. And so on for the rest." Yamamura drew deeply on his pipe before adding, almost apologetically: "That wasn't the only possible answer, of course. But it was the easiest, most obvious, most likely to occur to the thief."

"Unless Eleanor—" Vincent broke off. "Sorry!"

Yamamura looked from one to another of them. "I know who's responsible," he said, his tone more gentle than ever before that night.

They grew altogether still.

"Suppose we drop everything right now," proposed Yamamura. "The thief can mail the necklace back, anonymously."

Vincent shook his head. The young voice cracked over: "At this stage, who dares agree to that?"

"Go on," urged Rolt. Eleanor sat as if paralyzed. Agnes stubbed out her cigaret, shrugged, and said:

"Yes, do. The thief is bound to hope you guess wrong."

Yamamura's pipe was finished. He knocked the dottle out, got up and stood by the mantel. The pose looked neg-

ligent, but it distributed his weight evenly. He could move in any direction, fast, if need be.

"I suppose it is best," he sighed. "Okay, then. To begin with, Eleanor Swayne is innocent."

"Prove that!" spat Vincent. His knuckles stood white on his fists.

"If she'd lifted the necklace herself," said Yamamura, "she would have had to count on a thorough search of the house and grounds. Really thorough, by the police with the help of her parents, who know this place intimately. When she phoned you, Mr. Rolt, she automatically assumed the police would be called. Therefore, if she were the thief, she'd have had to conceal the necklace elsewhere, at least till tomorrow—in a hedge or ditch or some such place, during one of the short intervals before and after the party when she was alone here. But it's been drenching rain all the time. All her clothes are dry, as nearly as I could find out. So is the car in the garage. Therefore she never left the house."

Eleanor shuddered and covered her face.

"Could she have been in cahoots with one of us?" asked Vincent.

"Not with you or Miss Paley," said Yamamura. "She'd returned only some twelve hours ago, after months in the East. She'd maintained no close relationship with anyone in Berkeley. And you don't plot grand larceny, even with an old school chum, out of thin air. Now she might conceivably have tipped Mr. Rolt. I didn't think that was likely, because I've reason to believe that he of all people would never want trouble involving the Swaynes—"

"Absolutely." Rolt clasped Eleanor's shoulder.

"—But it could be," plodded Yamamura. "In that case, though, one or the other of you would have guided the conversation tonight to bring up that *Pythagorean Romaji* puzzle and spread suspicion; otherwise your guilt would have been all too provable. However, as we've reconstructed what was said, there's no evidence of such guiding. Miss Paley started talking about Greeks versus Orientals. The conversation drifted away from the subject and Mr. Vincent was the one who fetched it back and actually inquired what the mnemonic phrase was; another time Miss Paley did the rescuing. Logically, if she were running an operation with Mr. Rolt, Miss

Swayne ought to have blurted the numbers. Mr. Vincent gave her an A-1 opportunity, when he named a combination and asked if that was it. She could have made everyone present into a possible thief."

Agnes nodded thoughtfully and shook out a new cigaret for herself.

"Wait a minute!" Vincent half rose from his chair. "If you're implying that I—"

"Uh-uh." Yamamura shook his head. "This is a big old rabbit warren of a house. You've never been here before. All you knew was, the safe is behind a picture. Which, out of dozens? How would you even know there's a garret upstairs, without checking every door to every closet or— No, son, you just never had time."

The boy leaned back, puzzled, like the newcomer to judo who expects resistance and goes on his face for lack of it.

Yamamura looked with compassion at Agnes. "Yes," he said.

She didn't stir.

"You were familiar with this house, Miss Paley," said Yamamura. "You're a student of classical history. You knew all sorts of details about the Pythagoreans, like their maintaining headquarters at Crotona, but you never mentioned the most relevant one, their numerology. I submit that when you were l e a f i n g through that dictionary, you weren't checking words like *transmigration.* You w e r e looking up Japanese numbers."

"It isn't so," E l e a n o r gulped. "I don't believe him, Agnes."

The other girl smiled, like metal. "Why isn't Dennis Rolt a candidate?" she asked. "He wouldn't have to look up anything Japanese."

"I don't speak the language!" growled Rolt.

"If you lived for months in a foreign country and never even learned how they count," said Agnes coldly, "I'll agree you're too stupid to have solved the riddle."

"That's just it," said Yamamura. "He never was in Japan."

"What?" Oddly, Vincent was the one who barked that. Rolt stood above Eleanor's chair, his handsome face gone quite wooden.

Yamamura winced, inwardly. Maybe there was something in that old cliche, this hurts me worse than it does you. "I got suspicious when he bragged of being a judoka," he said. "Serious students of judo don't boast. When he

claimed to have a second-degree black belt after less than a year of occasional workouts in Kyoto, I knew he was a liar. No human being is that good. Nor do they hold promotional contests that often.

"Of course, he might still have been telling the truth otherwise, so I tested him. I slipped a remark to him about how only the Chinese put the surname first. He never even blinked. And yet the Japanese do the same, at home. They follow the Western order when abroad in Europe or America, so the fact would escape a superficial knowledge like Mr. Rolt's. But I do not believe he could have stayed in Japan any length of time, getting friendly with Japanese citizens, and not learned the truth!"

Yamamura finished harshly: "I tag him as a poseur, a fortune hunter, aiming to marry money. No wonder he didn't want the police here, or any publicity. He could stand it least of all."

Rolt stepped forward, his fists cocked. "That will do, Yamamura," he said. "Get out."

The detective shook his head. "Sorry. You've passed up your chance. I'm bound either to recover that necklace for Mr. Swayne, or tell him the facts and let him decide what to do."

"Get o u t! I'm warning you!"

Yamamura glanced at Eleanor. "There's no reason to prefer charges if Miss Paley returns the goods," he said. "She was poor, worried about her career, figured you had insurance, and fell for the temptation of a moment—"

Rolt uttered a choking noise. His fist struck toward Yamamura's jaw.

The detective blocked the blow, but let its momentum carry Rolt past him, assisted by hands and a foot at the ankles. They went down together, Yamamura on top. He shifted his hold, making it an arm lock, controlling the body by the simple process of sitting on it.

"Okay," he said after letting Rolt squirm a while. "Want to go get your coat? I'll drop you off at your hotel."

"Judas priest," said Vincent in awe.

"Dennis," whispered Eleanor. She seemed bound in her chair.

Yamamura felt a slumping in the man he held. He let go and stood up. "Well, Miss Paley?" he said.

Eleanor stared at her lap. "We'll never tell anyone," she

promised, mostly to herself.

Agnes rose too, still calm, but with no more color in her face. "The necklace is right in my car," she said.

Yamamura followed her out. Rolt brushed by them and disappeared down the street, walking fast. Eleanor stood in the open front door, framed against the light, staring after him.

Agnes fumbled with the trunk of her ancient Ford. "I stuffed it under the spare tire," she said. "I wonder if you'd do me one more kindness? Send me the bill, not Eleanor or her father. I'll pay ...somehow."

"Nobody's g o i n g to be billed." Yamamura huddled into his coat. Rain dripped off his hatbrim. "Tonight I've taken away that girl's man and her best friend. How the devil can I charge anybody for such a thing?"

CRIME UP IN THIS COUNTRY

Crime in the United States increased 9.3 percent in 1958 over 1957.

This year's crime clock shows —

a murder taking place every 64.2 minutes, —
a robbery every 7 minutes, —
a car being stolen every 1.9 minutes, —
a burglary taking place every 46.4 seconds, —
and *a forcible rape taking place every 36.1 minutes....*

Attorney General Rogers and F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover report an estimated 1,553,922 crimes classified as very serious offenses last year compared with 1,442,285 in 1957.

There were increases in murder, forcible rape (13 percent), robbery (12.7 percent), aggravated assault, burglary (12.6 percent), larceny over $50. (10.3 percent), and auto theft. *A crime covered in the index took place every 20.3 seconds last year.*

Current headlines to the contrary, youths under 18 represented only 12.1 percent of those arrested, *but* — teenagers accounted for 64.1 percent of *all* arrests for auto theft, 49.9 percent of *all* arrests for burglary, 48.5 percent of *all* arrests for larceny, 30.9 percent of *all* arrests for receiving or possessing stolen property, and 22.8 percent of *all* arrests for robbery.

Sixty-seven percent of those formally charged and held for prosecution were convicted.....

Last but far from least — we are told that crime increased more than five times as fast as the population.

the quiet type

by JANET OVERMYER

ALMA JEAN Jenkins was thirty-nine years old. Small, mousey type woman. Worked as a teller at the local bank. On Christmas Eve she walked into her mother's bedroom and stabbed her to death with the sharp bread knife. Sure did startle folks.

I remember Alma Jean Jenkins almost from the day she was born. Her ma pushing her in the brown wicker buggy with her brother toddling along beside. She was a pale little thing, with brownish hair and eyes and a pasty skin. Seems like her brother got all the family looks, thought none of us knew her pa, so we couldn't say for sure. Mrs. Jenkins never would say anything about him, and none of us had ever laid eyes on him. Mrs. Jenkins pushed that buggy up and down, showing off the baby just like she was something special. "Sweet little thing, isn't she," she'd say. "Maybe you think she isn't too much to look at right now. But she'll have all the family looks one of these days, you wait and see. She'll most likely be a smart little thing, too."

Well, Alma Jean never did improve much in looks, at least so I could notice, but her ma said she was smart, and maybe she was for all I knew. She went to the public

school for three or four years, and then Mrs. Jenkins startled everybody by sending her off to a private girls' school. Seems as if her brother should have been the one to go, if only one could be sent, but he kept right on at the public school, getting good marks and turning into a right handsome lad.

Mrs. Jenkins acted rather peculiar about him, though. Whenever we'd compliment her on his grades, or his making the baseball team, or his getting the lead in the sixth grade commencement play she'd smile thinly and say, "Yes, well, that's all right I suppose. But you keep your eye on Alma Jean. She's really the one to watch, now. You just wait till she gets going."

Poor little fella. I used to feel sorry for him, playing baseball with the others and all having a parent on the sidelines except him. And then later when he got the lead in the senior high school play, his ma nowhere in sight. Said she had a bad cold and couldn't venture out. There was talk around that he was all for going on to college after his graduation, but his ma put her foot down, I understand, and he went to work for Mr. Matthews the grocer instead. Uncrated fruit, straightened up the shelves and waited on the Saturday afternoon trade when Mr. Matthews got extra busy.

Mrs. Jenkins kept right on telling us about how well Alma Jean was doing at her girls' school. And then one Saturday afternoon Alma Jean got off the train and came on home, just one week before she was to have graduated. All sorts of talk went around, you can imagine, and none of us saw her for at least a week after she got back. When we did catch sight of her scrubbing the porches or doing the weekly shopping her face looked paler than ever and she always seemed to have just got over crying her eyes out. Talk was she had cheated on an exam and wouldn't be allowed to graduate, and that led to more talk that she wasn't as smart as her ma had let on, but you know how that sort of thing goes around.

Anyway, she got this job at the bank and started in for $25 a week, which was $5 more than anybody else had got to start. The bank's president was a good friend of Mrs. Jenkins. Her brother working at the grocery and her in the bank, things seemed to be looking up for their ma. Both brought their

paychecks straight home regular and turned them over to her, and she'd give them enough for their lunches. Seems as if she could settle down and take life easy. But that was before Alma Jean fell in love.

Tim Morrisey, his name was. His teller's cage was right next to Alma Jean's and he started to walk her home after work. She could never invite him in the house, of course, so they stood out in front and talked, with Mrs. Jenkins peeking through the curtains at him. After a bit of that he asked her to go to a picture show, and she went. Every Friday night after that they had a standing date to go to the show and out for a soda afterwards. Never did know rightly how Mrs. Jenkins took all this, but she did try to talk sense into Alma Jean.

"It bothers me, that lisp of his," she said to her daughter.

"I didn't notice that he lisped much, ma."

"And that silly way he has of standing on one foot and smiling at you. Reminds me of Luke Pearson's sheep dog."

"I think he's awfully nice, ma. Why don't you like him?"

"Now why would you think I didn't like him? Just want you to see him as he is, that's all. No use throwing yourself away on a fellow like that when there's somebody important just around the corner if you wait. Someday you'll meet the one right person for you, Alma Jean, and then you'll thank me on bended knee that I pointed out Tim Morrisey's faults to you. Wait awhile and see if I'm not right."

Well, they waited almost a year before Tim Morrisey gave her the ring. A real flashy stone it was, and Alma Jean was the proudest I've ever seen her when he slipped it on her finger as they were leaving the bank together after work. Happens I know it was only a zircon, but the idea was the same.

She hurried right on home to tell her ma, and Tim Morrisey went in with her for the first time in the afternoon, so's they could tell her together. Maybe that was the mistake they made, springing it on her sudden like that. Maybe if she'd had a chance to get used to the idea things would have been different.

As it was, she let out a scream you could have heard a mile and commenced to have hysterics. All about how

her little girl was going to go off with a no-good boor and leave her all alone in that great big house and after she had worked her fingers to the bone seeing that she had a better education than anyone else around. She carried on like that for maybe half an hour while Alma Jean cried and tried to calm her down, and Tim Morrisey stood around looking foolish, not daring to leave Alma Jean alone with her ma in such a state, and yet wishing he could go straight through the floor.

Finally Alma Jean's brother came home from work and saw what all the neighbors knew had been going on for quite some time now. He told Alma Jean to take Tim Morrisey and leave right away, go get Parson Henley to marry them right off, and never come back again. Well, at that, Mrs. Jenkins screeched her loudest and plumped right down on the floor full length, and just lay there. Then Alma Jean cried out that she had killed her mother and went down on her knees beside her ma's body and started crying again. Her brother grabbed Tim Morrisey by the arm and tried to talk him into taking Alma Jean and leaving immediately, but Tim was never one to take hasty action, and he couldn't see the sense of it. The upshot was that Alma Jean's brother lost his temper and swore he'd never see the inside of this house again as long as he lived, if he could help it. He stormed out the front door, slamming it behind him and sending a long, jagged crack down the glass. He marched right down to the recruiting office, he did, and enlisted in the navy. He's never been seen around here since. Luke Pearson, the mailman, says he still sends money home regular to his ma.

Next thing we knew, Tim Morrisey had been transferred to another bank upstate, and Alma Jean and her ma were right back as they had been, except that Alma Jean seemed quieter and paler and mousier than ever. Not that she didn't have friends, mind you. Every Thursday night she went to sewing circle, and sometimes on Fridays she'd go to the picture show with one of her girl friends. And so life went on.

Why, just a couple years ago a drummer came into the bank and began to take an interest in her. Walked her home, just like Tim Morrisey used to, and once took her to

the show. Then one evening Mrs. Jenkins met them at the front door, and called the drummer into the house. He left after fifteen minutes and never came back again. Funny thing was that Alma Jean never seemed to mind. Seemed she sort of expected something like that to happen.

Then on Christmas one of Alma Jean's aunts gave her a victrola. Mrs. Jenkins said it was all foolishness and she wouldn't have one of those frivolous things in her house. Alma Jean promised to give it away, but she didn't. She sneaked it upstairs to her bedroom, and hid it under a pile of unused blankets in her closet. She was getting on to her ma by now. She saved a little out of her lunch allowance and bought a few records for it, mostly those of John Marshall Landor. You remember him, that baritone that was so popular a few years back. On Saturday afternoons when her ma went shopping she'd get out the victrola and play the records over and over, always listening for her ma to come back so's she could put everything away again.

Then the unbelievable happened. John Marshall Landor was giving a concert in person in Harristown, just 35 miles away. Alma Jean knew she had to go, and she plotted it for weeks ahead. First she saved up enough to buy the ticket and the bus fare, little by little, so her ma wouldn't notice. Then, on *the* night, she arranged with a girl friend of hers to come over and say they were going to a show together, and it was a longer one than usual so they wouldn't be home until real late. Mrs. Jenkins said that was all right with her, just so she knew where her little girl was, and waved them off from the porch.

Everything went off without a hitch. Alma Jean caught her bus and sat through the concert in a rosy haze. She couldn't afford any better than a balcony ticket, but she could hear just fine, and that's what counted. After the concert was over, the concert that hadn't lasted near long enough, she went on down the steps with the others, hardly knowing where she was going. Somehow she must have taken a wrong turning because first thing she knew she sort of came to and found herself backstage. A lot of folks were crowding around and there, so close she could have reached out and touched him, was John Mar-

shall Landor himself. He was standing by a pile of his photographs, and was autographing them. Alma Jean almost held her breath at seeing him up so close.

Then he turned to her, pen in hand, and said, "And what is your name, my dear?" She hardly had breath enough to gasp it out.

He signed the photograph, "To Alma Jean, J. M. Landor," and gave it to her. She took it carefully in her gloved hands and floated out of the theatre. She was so excited she even forgot to thank him for it. She wished she had dared to ask for an envelope to keep it nice but she held it very carefully on her lap on the bus home.

Luckily her ma was asleep when she let herself in, and she was able to sneak it upstairs and slip it under the blankets with no one the wiser. Next day she bought a glass frame in the dime store. She slipped that into the house, too, under her coat, and put her precious picture in it. Now, on Saturday afternoons when her ma was out, she could look at the picture of the handsome, smiling, baritone, while she listened to his beautiful voice on the victrola.

She eked out the money for a few more records by skipping her lunch occasionally, and soon she had every song he had ever recorded. Then she haunted the record counter, waiting for new ones to come out. This went on for some months, with no one the wiser. Christmas time came around again, and John Marshall Landor had a brand new record out of "Silent Night." Alma Jean bought it on December 24th and took it home to add to her collection. She was going to a small Christmas party the bank was giving for its employees, so she carefully slipped the record in with the others and gave it a loving pat.

She wished she could hear that deep voice sing it just once before she went out, but her ma was in the kitchen and she knew better than to try to play it now. She took up the picture in its frame and smiled at it. Then she did something she had never done before. She leaned forward and placed a light kiss on the mouth of the photograph, on top of the glass. Then, feeling a little foolish, she slipped the picture back under the blankets, made sure that no bulges showed, and went on to her party.

None of what happened later would have taken place if

the night hadn't suddenly turned cold, and Mrs. Jenkins hadn't gone into Alma Jean's room to get out the extra blankets.

When Alma Jean softly let herself in that night, after her ma had gone to bed, she knew as soon as she walked into her room that something was wrong. Then she saw that her closet door was standing open, and the victrola was gone. The wastebasket was filled up to the top with broken bits of records. But that wasn't so bad. Records could be bought again. What mattered most was the beautiful photograph. It was torn in a hundred pieces, and the bits piled up right in the center of Alma Jean's bed. The glass frame was in fragments in the wastebasket on top of the records.

Alma Jean didn't cry or go to pieces. She stood still for for the longest time and stared at the mess.

I guess I already told you what she did then. Like I said, everybody was sure surprised. A nice, well-brought up girl like Alma Jean. I guess you never can tell about some folks.

NEXT MONTH -

G. K. Chesterton's THE SHADOW OF THE SHARK

Johnston McCulley's THUBWAY THAM'S BOMB SCARE

Philip Atkey's PROSPER FAIR AND THE FIREFLY

Russell Janney's I CROSS THE RUBICON

Robert Bloch's THE BIG SEND

and

Leslie Charteris' THE SAINT AND THE DOUBLE BADGER

— in THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

THE GIRL IN WHITE

IT WOULD be unfair to say that Dr. Sprouser was conceited. His manner was overly assured, perhaps, but in his profession that was necessary. He certainly did not think of himself as a conceited man; he thought of himself as a dedicated and humble practitioner of psychiatry. But psychiatry is an inexact science, and the more inexact a science is the more self-assured its practitioners must be. Dr. Sprouser was a good psychiatrist. He charged and received twenty-five dollars an hour and was booked solid three weeks in advance.

So it was that, having listened to Alfred Beck's story —and having privately decided that until he had more information there wasn't much he could do for the young man but administer a little palliative therapy—he leaned back in his chair and spoke in a soothing but authoritative voice.

"Now, Mr. Beck—or may I call you Alfred? Thank you. I'd like to get our relationship on an informal basis—you say you first dreamed of this girl about six months ago. What does she look like?"

"About twenty-two, light-haired, pretty," Alfred said nervously, "and dressed in white."

Dr. Sprouser smiled. He had a charming smile. "Well, I don't see anything horrible about that. It seems—"

He stopped speaking. Alfred had risen quickly and walked over to the window. He stood with his back turned, arms held stiffly at his sides, fists clasping and unclasping. Dr. Sprouser waited, and presently the young man turned back.

"It's not the girl that's horrible." Words spurted from his mouth as though from an irregularly pressured pump. "Although there's something about her I can't understand. She's...weird. But it's what she tells me that's driving me insane. Night after night she tells me the same thing. It's got so I'm afraid to go to sleep."

"What does she tell you?"

There was a moment of bleak silence. Then, "I never can remember," Alfred said.

He came back to the desk and slumped down in his former chair. "What am I going to do?"

Dr. Sprouser studied him. Alfred was thin, his face was pale and there were dark circles of exhaustion underneath his eyes. And yet the referring physician had stated that he was organically sound.

"First, I want you to under-

stand that you're not going insane. There's nothing basically wrong with you," the doctor said. "Next, I want you to take a lot of exercise. Walk. Eat good food. And Alfred, there are a few more things I'd like to know."

"Ask me. I'll answer if I can."

"Does this girl remind you of anyone? Think back. Think back as far as you can, and then go farther still."

"No use, Doctor. I've tried that and it doesn't work. I've never seen her in my life."

"She's dressed in white. Like a nurse?"

"No," Alfred said, "she wears black, high-heeled shoes and her stockings are the usual color. But her coat is white. She keeps it buttoned but I've seen a white dress under it. Always the same coat and dress. No hat."

The doctor was silent for a moment, thinking. "Are you afraid of death?"

"Isn't everybody?"

"Yes, but to varying degrees. The reason I ask," Dr. Sprouser said, "is that in many parts of the world white, not black, is the color of mourning. I'm wondering if there isn't some connection."

The young man made a convulsive effort as though he were about to rise a second time. Then he sighed and sank back in his chair. "I don't think it's death that I'm afraid of. It's the thought of what comes afterward, or doesn't come afterward, that frightens me. If all this"—he made a vague, world-inclusive gesture—"were to end in total extinction—well, that's an idea that's too much for me. My mind isn't equipped to take it in."

"And so you fear it. Have you considered talking to your minister or priest?"

Alfred shook his head. "Religion doesn't have the answer, not my answer. I'm not a sceptic but I just lack faith."

Dr. Sprouser repressed a sigh. His young patient wasn't giving him much help. "Let's get back to the girl. What's her name?"

"How should I know?"

"You hold what seems to be a regular nightly conversation. Hasn't she told you? Haven't you ever asked?"

Alfred said slowly, "It never occurred to me. But now that I think about it, I know that for some reason I don't want to ask."

"Afraid?"

The young man shrugged. "For six months I've been afraid of everything. A dog barks in the next block—I'm

afraid I'm going to be bit."

"But I must have something to work with. You realize, don't you, that you haven't given me much? And you must learn to face these irrational fears." The doctor paused. "When and if you dream of her again, I advise you to find out what her name is."

Alfred frowned. "It's necessary?"

"V i t a l l y necessary," Dr. Sprouser said. "And now I think we've done as much as we can do today. Same time tomorrow. Don't forget what I told you—eat good food, get plenty of exercise, walk..."

Alfred followed the doctor's orders. He decided to walk home, a distance of five miles. It was late afternoon when he started, and the sun was setting as he entered a small park that marked approximately the halfway point. The path he followed was bounded on the right by dense shrubbery, and it paralleled a residential street. On the far side of the street, lights were beginning to be turned on in a row of small, neat houses. Alfred was tired. Coming to a park bench, he sat down and stared unseeingly at the graveled path.

He could have sworn he did not fall asleep. But, without having h e a r d anyone approach, he suddenly sensed another's presence at his side. He did more than that. Without lifting his eyes he knew intuitively who the other person was. Perhaps it was the clean, sharp odor of verbena of which he now became aware, and which he always associated with the girl in white. He did not want to look at her but the muscles of his neck flexed of their own volition. His head turned, and she was there.

She was exactly as he had remembered, and he thought that it was curious how much from one dream to another he forgot. She was young, and beautiful in a fragile fashion, and immaculately dressed in white. All that he remembered, but he had forgotten the expression in her eyes. They were gray eyes, unusually large, and there was a quality about them which he could only describe as fey. They met his own eyes steadily and he sat with his heart pounding, w a i t i n g—as he knew she would—to speak.

"Hello," she said. "You here again?" Her voice was soft but held an undercurrent of bubbling laughter. It was as disquieting as her eyes.

He nodded. "I'm here. And

there's something I want to tell you. I want you to stop bothering me every time I fall asleep."

"I bother *you?* Well, I like that! It's the other way around," she said. "Right now I'm at home taking a nap before dinner. I *was* taking a nap, that is, until I suddenly found myself on this park bench across the street from Mary Anderson's."

Alfred thought it over. It didn't make much sense. "Let's get this straight. I dream about you every night," he said. "Every night you tell me something, give me a message of some kind, and when I wake up I'm in a state of nervous collapse. But I never can remember what the message is."

"That's funny," the girl said. "I can remember perfectly. What's more, there are only a few hours left before it happens."

"Before what happens?"

"Murder," she said. Then, catching his expression, she added on a note of quiet intentness, "Don't you honestly remember? Honestly?"

"Honestly," he said, "and I don't think—"

She broke in, speaking rapidly, "Tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock a woman will be murdered in that house across the street. Number 427. And there's nothing you or I or anybody else can do to stop it." She paused. "That's all."

"It isn't much," he said. "Just a little more than you can expect me to believe."

"It's all that I can tell you now," she said. "There are parts of it that aren't clear even to me. But I know that it will happen whether you believe it or not, and personally I'm glad. I despise the woman who owns that house. I hate her. Her name's Mary Anderson and she's disgustingly rich—imagine having a whole house to yourself instead of living like a normal human being in an apartment!—and she's bought herself a husband. He's the sweetest man in the world and I happen to be in love with him."

The girl was a dingbat. That was obvious. Her story about taking a pre-dinner nap, not being here at all, was patently absurd. Alfred knew that if he touched her hand he would feel flesh pleasantly soft but solid. He did not touch it. He eyed her warily.

"What are you," he asked, "psychic or something?"

She nodded. After an instant's hesitation, she said gravely, "Yes, I'm...something."

Well, he knew it now. He

knew the message she had been giving him night after night for six devestated months, and he knew that this time he would remember it. But where was the horror he had previously felt? Alfred felt absolutely nothing.

Then he remembered the advice of Dr. Sprouser. He asked quietly, "Do you mind telling me your name?"

"I don't mind," she said. "It's Sibyl—Sibyl Cassidy."

Again nothing. Alfred turned away. He looked at the row of houses, trying to place 427. As though from far away he heard the girl's continuing voice, still with its undercurrent of bubbling laughter.

"Odd you shouldn't have known that. I've known yours all the time," she said. "It's Alfred Beck. And Alfred—I should have told you this before—there's nothing to be afraid of. Absolutely nothing."

Maybe, Alfred thought. But knowing that she was sitting there beside him he was, perhaps for the first time in six months, unafraid.

"You say this Mary Anderson lives at 427?" he asked.

There was no answer. When he turned back, starting to repeat the question, he was alone on the park bench. Sibyl Cassidy had gone.

But there had been no place for her to go. The shrubbery behind the bench was thick. The street lamps had been turned on; they clearly lit up the path in both directions, and there was no one on the path.

Alfred stiffened, fighting off a premonitory chill. The sense of impending terror, until this moment oddly lacking, surged in on him like an occupying army. He knew he had not been asleep. For the first time the girl in white had appeared and spoken to him when he was wide awake. Somehow this fact gave credence to the improbable prophecy she'd made. He stared at the row of houses. Presently, he got up.

Alfred crossed the street. He found Number 427, climbed the steps to the front door, pressed the bell. He waited, not knowing what he would do when the door was opened, certain only that there was one thing that he must find out.

The door opened. A woman looked at him inquiringly. Amber light was at her back. Her face was shadowed but he could see that she had a sort of disintegrating prettiness. She was about forty, almost twenty years older than Sibyl Cassidy.

"Yes?"

"I beg your pardon," he said, and forced himself to go on. "Does Mr. Anderson live here?"

"Mr. Anderson's not at home right now," she said. "I'm Mrs. Anderson."

"Mrs. *Mary* Anderson?"

"Yes. Why?" She waited.

He could not tell her. What was there he could say? "Sorry your husband's not—not in, Mrs. Anderson," he stammered. "Your name was given me by—by my sales manager. I wonder—that is, I'd like to interest him—or you—in an insurance policy—"

She interrupted. "We're both fully covered." She shut the door.

Alfred did not walk the rest of the way home. He took a cab. It dropped him in front of his apartment house, and he had trouble walking even the short distance to the elevator that carried him to his apartment on the fourth floor. Inside, he double-locked the door and looked up Dr. Sprouser's home telephone number. It was not in the book.

"That is an unlisted number," the operator told him when he dialed Information. "I am not permitted to give it to you."

"But this is important. Terribly important!"

"I am not permitted to give it to you," the operator said.

On an off-chance, he called the doctor's office. He was told, by the telephone exchange that answered, that Dr. Sprouser was spending the night out of town. He could be reached at his office in the morning.

Alfred went to bed, but not to sleep. He did not dare to sleep. At nine in the morning he was on the phone again. At nine-fifteen the doctor's secretary finally answered.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Beck," she said. "Your appointment is for four o'clock."

"But something's happened! I *must* see him—just for a minute or two. I have to see him before eleven!"

"Sorry," she said again. "He couldn't possibly see you before four."

Alfred was in the park at twenty minutes to eleven. He sat on the bench staring at the home of Mary Anderson. At one minute before the hour he got up slowly, and at one minute after eleven he sat down again. Nothing had happened, but he felt no relief. What had he expected? The front door of the house was closed, its window shades were drawn, he could not see through walls.

His legs were heavy when he entered Dr. Sprouser's reception room at four o'clock; his mind was working sluggishly. It was too late now. Even if the murder had actually been committed there was nothing he could do about it. Absolutely nothing...

The secretary said that Dr. Sprouser was ready for him and he went into the private inner office, but he was hardly aware of what he was doing. The doctor, looking at him sharply, said, "Sit down, Alfred. What's the matter?" Alfred sat down but a couple of minutes passed before he was able to speak intelligibly.

The doctor settled back in his chair as he listened to the young man's rambling, disconnected phrases. Alfred, he realized, was seriously disturbed; this was going to be a more difficult case than he had previously believed. But he preferred the difficult cases. A nicely deteriorated schizophrenic presented a much more interesting problem than a housewife with an attack of mental hives. Uncertain of his approach, Dr. Sprouser's manner as he grappled with this problem had never been more authoritative.

"Another dream, of course. You were tired by the long walk and fell asleep."

"You're wrong, Doctor. That girl was real. I talked to her as certainly as I'm talking to you now!"

Dr. Sprouser shrugged. "Then you were hallucinating. That's possible, of course. Did you remember to ask her name?"

"I did. It's Sibyl Cassidy."

The doctor gave a little start. "Sibyl," he repeated, drawing out the name into two affectionately rounded syllables, "Sibyl Cassidy! Don't you see it, Alfred? Don't you understand?"

"Understand what?"

"You know what a sibyl was, don't you? I see you don't. In antique times a sibyl was a prophetess," he said. "And *Cassidy*—it all fits in! Cassidy is a play on words summoned up by your unconscious. The real name is Cassandra."

Alfred was bewildered. "Who's Cassandra?"

"The daughter of Priam and Hecuba of ancient Troy. A woman fated never to be believed. But of course you knew that, although you didn't know you knew."

"I never heard of her!"

"You did," Dr. Sprouser told him firmly, "but the fact is buried deep in your mental filing cabinet. Don't worry; we'll dig it out, now that we

have a hint as to what we're looking for." The doctor silently congratulated himself. The road ahead would be tortuous and bumpy but Alfred unknowingly had provided him with an excellent road-map. He had to learn to read it; that was all.

"Alfred," he said, "I want you to return to that park, sit on that same bench. Put yourself in the same position and, if possible, the same frame of mind you were in yesterday. I want you to convince yourself that Sibyl Cassidy does not in reality exist, that she was an hallucination or a dream."

"Suppose she turns out to be nothing of the kind. Suppose I find her waiting—?"

"You won't. I believe I can promise you that safely," the doctor said.

Alfred went back to the park at sunset. Sibyl was not there. He sat on the bench and stared down at the graveled path as he had done the day before. He told himself that the girl in white was no more than a figment of his imagination. And just as he was on the verge of convincing himself, he smelled the clean, sharp odor of verbena, and looked up—and she was sitting beside him exactly as he had remembered.

"Hello," she said.

He didn't answer, and presently she spoke again.

"You're late. I expected you at eleven."

"I was here." Alfred's voice was hoarse.

"Well, I guess I must have missed you. I was pretty busy then," she said. "Anyway, it happened just the way I said it would."

"What happened?"

"The murder, of course. They found the body half an hour ago." She moved slightly and Alfred caught a quick glimpse of color underneath her coat.

He said, "You're wearing a flower. Would you give it to me, please?"

"Why?"

"Because it's the first time I've seen you wear an ornament of any kind. You're always dressed in white."

"That's a silly reason. What's the real one?"

"Okay," he said. "It's because I'd like to have something tangible to show to my psychiatrist. He doesn't think you're real."

She laughed. "I'm real. I can't give you the flower, but you may have a few petals if you like." She reached inside her coat and then dropped two red petals into Alfred's hand. "Don't be afraid, Alfred. I used to be afraid like you. I'm

not any more. Listen—here comes another police car."

Alfred heard an approaching siren. He looked across the street. Three squad cars were parked in the thickening dusk before 427. As he watched, a fourth car drew up behind them. Its siren died and men climbed out. For the first time he saw the crowd that had gathered on the sidewalk. The curious people all stood facing the small house. Two men with cameras were taking pictures, their flashbulbs bright, white pops of light against the gloom. When he turned back Sibyl Cassidy had disappeared.

He was not surprised. He was no longer capable of surprise. The flower petals in his hand were incontravertible proof that a moment before she had actually been there. After a while he rose from the bench and walked across the street. He joined the crowd.

A stocky man said in a hushed, excited voice, "When they found her she was in the kitchen laying on her face. Whoever done it shot her right spang through the heart." He was talking to a short man dressed in dungarees.

"Why would anybody want to do a thing like that?"

"Who knows? Guess that's what the cops are trying to find out."

If that was true, Alfred knew the answer to their problem. He knew the motive behind the murder of Mary Anderson. It was his duty as a citizen to tell what he knew to the police. But he wanted no part of it. He walked away.

Conscience slowed his footsteps. He hesitated, then reluctantly turned back. A uniformed policeman stopped him at the front door of the house.

"Beat it, Mac. You can't come in."

Alfred told him wearily to take him to whoever was in charge of the investigation. "I know why she was murdered. I've just been talking to the girl who did it. Let's get this over with," he said.

The policeman called to someone in the house, and there followed a confused interval during which Alfred was pushed, not ungently, toward a hallway in the rear. Then he was in the kitchen. A sheet had been thrown over a motionless figure on the floor, and Alfred was standing in front of Detective Lieutenant Brannigan. Brannigan was a big man with a big, round face and cold blue eyes.

"Another crackpot? Go

ahead. That's what I'm paid for—to listen to you guys."

Alfred told his story. "She predicted the murder yesterday," he summed it up, "and it happened exactly as she said it would. She did it, all right. How could she have known the time Mrs. Anderson would be killed if she hadn't planned to kill her?"

The lieutenant frowned, but there was a hint of pity in his chilly eyes. "You're a real crackpot, aren't you, bud? You sure got things confused. Mary Anderson's not dead. She's been arrested for murder. She confessed. You don't believe me, look underneath that sheet."

Alfred lifted one end of the sheet. Sibyl Cassidy lay beneath it. Her face was as white now as her dress; she was all white except for what looked like a red corsage that had been pinned above her heart. Her gray eyes were open and she was smiling slightly, as though she and Alfred shared a secret, and Alfred remembered that she had told him not to be afraid. He nodded slowly, studying his fingers, the thumb and forefinger that had held the bright red petals. They held no petals now. The color that stained them was the darkening rust-brown of drying blood.

IN FORTHCOMING ISSUES -

Watch for -

Poul Anderson's STAB IN THE BACK, a new Trygve Yamamura story

Philip Atkey's SMILER BUNN'S CHRISTMAS ALIBI

Lawrence G. Blochman's THE ALDINE FOLIO MURDERS

Wenzell Brown's THE DEATH OF JOE THE GRINDER

and — of course —

STILL MORE STORIES ABOUT THE SAINT

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

— *in THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*

no roses for us

by RANJEE SHAHANI

I AM NOT complaining. Oh no. I am only trying to tell the truth, which is a pretty difficult thing for a woman to do.

Yes, I live in a remarkable country, a country which, like India, has been vivisected. We are now free, of course, but we are definitely not ourselves. The head and the trunk lie apart.

I don't know how Indians feel about their present condition; so far as I can see, they seem to enjoy going about without the upper part. We feel sort of naked and ashamed of ourselves.

I am not complaining. I am merely recording facts.

My home is in Hanoi, which, as you may possibly know, is today the capital of Indo-Chinese Communism. Am I myself a Red? Heaven alone knows. I don't bother about politics. If you do, you are— I will not tell you what; I don't like being impolite.

What I and those other bipeds who wear the skirt want from life is simple enough; we desire home, a man to love, children, and a few knick-knacks. Men never understand this; they are always crediting us with virtues and defects that we do not possess and do not care to possess.

To be sure there are some

women who are ambitious and thirst for power or pelf; the majority of us, however, do not care for these shadow-shows.

I myself am married and have three children—two boys and one girl. I think that's just right. My husband—why talk of him?—was a true Chinese mandarin. He made love to me under the August moon, whispered sweet nothings, and then tried to laze luxuriously. He seemed to think that he had bought a free housekeeper and a free provider.

I watched his antics for full five years. He did not improve; indeed, he became more lordly than ever. I had to work the whole day in an office, then come home and look after the children, then do the cooking, then attend to my husband, then, then, then!

I am not complaining...

One day I had gone to a friend's house; she was a Frenchwoman, and I watched with all my eyes how her man was behaving. Why, this fat ugly thing, with more hair on her face than I have on my whole body, was treated like a queen! Immediately I went into the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror. Why, any day, I said to myself, I am ten times prettier than this lump of flesh! Yet what is my condition? I have to slave night and day to keep my family going. Suddenly I was so angry with myself that I gave myself a thundering slap in the face. The noise was so great that my hostess rushed in.

"What's the matter with you, dear?" she said in her gurgling voice. Then, seeing my red cheek, she cried, as only a Frenchwoman can cry: "Who's done this to you? Charles! Charles! Call the police!"

It was difficult for me to explain that no one had molested me and that I myself had dealt the blow to myself. However, to cover up (we women are great at that, hence most of our troubles), I put it all on a ghost.

Now don't tell me that the Europeans are an advanced race; personally I don't believe it. You won't believe it either when you hear what happened next. This brave French couple left the house the following day, thinking it was haunted! Nobody would buy it, of course. However, I did.

Don't imagine that I was trying to be clever or that I played any trickery. That slapping of myself was the beginning of wisdom for me; the scales dropped from my

eyes and I saw what should have been seen.

I returned to my old home, that wonderful day of the slap, a bit too early, and what do I find? My lord and master was holding on his knee my youngest cousin, who had floated in from nowhere. Then I saw red, and for a moment became red. Don't misunderstand me; I'm not using the capital "R"; I am using our simple "r", which can be terrible.

Well, to cut a long story short, I kicked my husband out of the house, and broke his pipe of peace on his head. Then I shifted to the new house which I had bought.

I'm not complaining.

How to live in that big new house? Papa accompanied me; Mama accompanied me, Auntie accompanied me; two cousins drifted up from the provinces, hearing of my good fortune, and before I realised it I had more mouths to feed than I cared to see.

I'm not complaining.

I had exhausted all my savings, and was selling my jewels one by one, when what should happen but that the International Commission should be appointed in Vietnam, with its headquarters in Hanoi. I was thrilled. I had met suckers before—I'm thinking of the Americans—but I had a feeling that I was going to encounter champion suckers.

You might think, hearing me talk like this, that I am a terrible woman—six foot tall, with a head like a melon and teeth like a giantess'. You're wrong, my friend, completely wrong. Here are my measurements: I am just five feet one inch tall, with a waist like a wasp's, and hair that might be compared to midnight. My eyes are small, to be sure, but they can see as well as any microscope.

The Europeans call us the Yellow Race. I've often wondered whether their sense of colour was not terribly defective. My skin has the glow of an alabaster lamp when it is filled with fire, and my body, at thirty two, has the suppleness and firmness of that of a young girl. My nails are naturally pink; I don't have to put on varnish to look nice. Yet we are dismissed as the Yellow Race.

I am not complaining.

It was very easy for me to get a job on the International Commission. The officer in charge, a short stocky fellow, with hair like a puff of blown steam, looked at me, blinked, and blinked again.

"How much do you want per month?" he asked in an almost begging voice.

I put up my price.

He looked at me again, looked at me from top to toe, and smiled as though at a special thought. "I'll make it 2,000 more," he said, "if you join us from tomorrow. If you have any friends, like you, who'd like to join us, please bring them in."

That night we had a feast at home: Indians were made by God to be exploited by clever folk. That man I went to see couldn't have been better if I had ordered him straight from some factory in Birmingham.

I don't know much English; it is not like French, which has a caress about it. I use English when I wish to hit a nail on the head. For that it is first class.

What do you think I did after I'd won over this little Indian officer who held a big job? I filled the International Secretariat with my pals. I don't believe, like certain naive people, in pure altruism; I like it, as the English put it, with ten per cent added to it.

I am merely trying to say that I put twenty girls, more or less good-looking, into the International Secretariat. Each one paid me, every month, 10% of her salary for getting her the job. I did enjoy myself: now I had plenty of money, plenty of lieutenants, and plenty of admirers: for I was, believe it or not, the best-looking of the lot.

I cannot forget the Chairman of the International Commission: he was a small man with a tummy like a barrel, and nondescript myopic eyes. To watch him come into the dining room or the conference room was in itself an experience: he did not walk; he waddled in. He looked neither to the left, nor to the right, but at once took his place as Chairman, said "Good morning" to various people on the other two delegations (he had no time for courtesies to his own people), took a cigarette, tapped it on his cigarette case, put it in his mouth and then began a farce with his lighter, which, more often than not, refused to function, or functioned so well that it nearly burnt his nose.

All the Indians, except one, were afraid of him. "Yes, sir. Yes, sir," they said to everything.

Now I don't want you to think that this Indian chairman was a buffoon; indeed, he was a very competent man, so competent that he knew the

Geneva Agreement not only by heart, but, so to speak, upside down. I have a hunch, as my American friends would say, that he rehearsed the Geneva Agreement even in the bathroom. That is all that he seemed to know.

Now this Brown Devil, as we girls used to call him, was very very nice to me. I had just to say a thing and he would smile with all his false teeth and say: "Yes. Certainly. At once."

I don't pretend to be a saint; I hope you have gathered that by now. Being conscious of my power, I occasionally used it. The poor political officers would send me flowers, not because they liked me (in fact they hated me), but because I wouldn't say a word against them to the Ambassador. He had a wonderful way, this Chairman, of dealing with a fellow he did not like; he just refused to give him any work. How often have I seen young Indians, drawing fat salaries, sitting in their offices doing nothing. Naturally, they would come to me and pour out their troubles. I encouraged them to speak; all I had to do was to be a good listener, which I am by nature. From time to time I threw in a smile, not because I wanted to smile at anything, but because I have teeth that compare to two rows of pearls. You see, beauty is not beauty until it is admired.

I seldom ate at home; at lunch time one or another clerk would invite me out and feed me sumptuously. It was the officers who were mean; they'd invite you for a drink, and then, after a second cocktail, try to paw you. They wanted their money's worth; the clerks were better-natured: they did it all for pure show. It was enough for them to be seen with a pretty girl.

Of the Poles and the Canadians I need not speak: the former were with us no matter what we did, the latter were against us ideologically. In any case, socially they were no good: both were white (how can the Red and the non-Red both be white?) and were very conscious of their whiteness. The Canadians went with the Canadian girls and the Poles with the Polish girls—and an uglier bunch than these Polish and Canadian girls I have yet to see.

But why waste any time over the Poles and the Canadians; they don't belong to the world of Panchshila; we and the Indians do; we have to learn to co-exist (I hope it won't come to co-habitation).

So far, I have been telling you about things that the reports of the Ambassadors do not contain. These, you may like to know, are wonderful documents: they tell you a great deal about nothing.

But I suppose the world spins on the law of make-believe. I feel very sure of this statement when I consider the lot of members of my own sex in North Vietnam. So far, we've been promised so many things that I've ceased to count them. What is the reality? Before, we were beasts of burden—that is, we had to slave for our families. Now that phase is over; we have advanced, and are fast advancing towards the topmost peak of hope. We are now double slaves: we have to slave for the family, and slave still harder for the State, the new god.

I am not complaining....

AGAIN AN EDITORIAL ASIDE-

The stereotype, and it *is* a stereotype, of the knife-wielding, dope-pushing Porto Rican teenager, has received seeming confirmation these recent weeks in the wave of teenage violence — the wave of senseless giggling violence — which has erupted here in New York.

There is need for sober community leadership at this stage — *not* to murmur pious Freudian exorcisms — but to bring out and to bring out repeatedly the fact that these youngsters are no more representative of their community than *any* criminal, old or young, is representative of his social or ethnic group.

This urge to violence, this urge to senseless violence, respects no social barriers and ignores, in actuality, no section of the community. This is what makes it the more frightening, that you cannot, if you are honest, draw four lines and say that within these is the centrum of the disease.... This disease — and it is just that which is gripping us by the throat — can hit Park Avenue and "Spanish Harlem" and "Hells Kitchen" with equal and dreadful impartiality!

What can be done — beyond praying?

Try to modify the tabloid glorification of these young hoodlums whose sole moments of glory in their young and senseless and empty lives come when they stare out at you — blank-faced or snarling — from the pages of your favorite tabloid....

Strengthen our Courts. Give them the authority to deal with these youngsters as they should be dealt with!

And strengthen our Police! Give them, too, the authority to cope *adequately* with the situation.

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ANNIVERSARY PRESENT

by THEODORE R. COGSWELL

ALBERT SLUSSEN had a mania for privacy, and ordinarily the little clicks that indicated that the neighbors up the road had picked up their receivers to listen in on the party line would have sent him into a sulky rage. But since he intended to murder his wife Martha that day, he just gave a wintry smile and proceeded to talk for the record.

"Now let's not get sentimental, Martha," he said. "I know today is our anniversary, but I won't be able to come up to the lake until tomorrow. I've got some odds and ends in the lab that just have to be cleaned up... Anniversary present? No, I didn't forget. I'll tell you what, you give me a call about noon and I may have a surprise for you... Of course I'm curious about mine... All right, you s u r p r i s e me too... Noon sharp, then. Bye dear."

After his wife hung up he waited until two faint clicks gave evidence that Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Liscomb had completed their eavesdropping. He gave a little grunt of satisfaction. Much as they'd hate to make their snooping public, Slussen knew that

their consciences would force them to testify on his behalf when the police came around. As he replaced the telephone receiver on its hook, he took a quick look at his watch. 10:50. It was time to begin.

Albert Slussen, a small precise man with balding head and finicky habits, had been an electronics engineer before the marriage that made it financially possible for him to retreat from the world he hated. His fingers were deft and sure as they quickly checked the complicated apparatus on the table beside him and then connected it to the telephone. Then, after setting the timing device that would switch on the machine at exactly twelve o'clock, he picked up a carefully p r e p a r e d typescript from beside the telephone and tucked it away in his inside pocket. It was 11:02 when he climbed into his small black coupe.

Nobody saw him as he pulled out onto the country highway and turned north. The Bartons and the Liscombs lived a quarter of a mile to the s o u t h, down around the bend in the road. When he and Martha had been house hunting, he had deliberately selected a spot offering the maximum amount of isolation. Albert Slussen didn't like p e o p l e: the farther he could keep away from them, the better he liked it.

Martha hadn't been happy about moving so far out in the country, but as usual, had finally—though reluctantly—given in. She only stood firm on one thing—the telephone. It was her last link with her old friends and her old life, and in spite of his protests, she refused to have it taken out.

"I don't care if Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Liscomb do listen in," she said with unexpected firmness. "The poor old dears almost never get out of the house and they're lonely. I know how they feel. They don't mean anything by it. You almost never use the phone anyway."

And so the telephone remained, a constant source of irritation until one day when he thought of a foolproof way to get rid of it—and Martha. From then on he did his best to be a model husband. He even agreed to move up to the lake for part of the summer.

Among her other possessions, Martha owned a little

cabin at Lake Mohagen, a summer resort fifty miles away. She loved the place, which to Slussen's austere mind seemed cluttered with moldy mementos and useless bric-a-brac, and in spite of the cabin's being set off by itself way up at the tip of the lake, he had always stubbornly refused to set foot inside it. He said there were too many people around.

His nerves were jumping and his muscles tense by the time he covered the forty miles to Clinton, a condition not improved by the loss of ten minutes trying to find a parking place. It was 12:02 before he slid panting and perspiring into one of the long row of telephone booths at the back of the drugstore. Bending his head so that he couldn't be seen from outside the booth, he stuffed a wad of cotton into each nostril to give his voice a nasal quality and took out the script he had so carefully prepared. He had committed his lines to memory but he was taking no chances on forgetting them—the stakes were too high. At exactly five minutes after twelve he dropped a dime in the slot and dialed the long distance operator.

Twenty seconds later he had deposited the necessary coins, adjusted his glasses to focus clearly on the script, and was listening to the distant ring.

One... He had a soothing mental vision of Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Liscomb eagerly waddling over to their telephones and waiting for the ringing to stop so they could listen in.

Two... The machine had to operate, he had eliminated every possibility of failure.

Three... The tape recorder should be running smoothly now.

Four... The arm attached to the receiver lifting slowly.

Fi...

"Hello?"

Slussen was barely able to control a gasp of relief as he heard the distant sound of his own voice coming over the wires. Pitching his voice as low as he could he said, "Mr. Slussen, my name's Arnett, Robert Arnett. According to a contact of mine in Washington you've just taken out a patent on an automatic electronic timer that looks as if it has definite commercial

promise. I was wondering if I couldn't drop out to your place and talk to you about it."

"I never see anybody," he heard himself growl. "If you have any business to take up with me you can write a letter like everybody else does."

"But I'm only forty miles away. I could drive over in less than an hour."

"I'm sorry," said the voice at the other end brusquely, "but I just haven't got time. I'm joining my wife at our summer place tomorrow and I've got to pack."

"But Mr. Slussen..."

"Goodbye!" There was the crash of a receiver being slammed down violently. His timing had been perfect.

"Hope that gave those old biddies an earache," grunted Slussen to himself as he hung up and slipped out of the booth.

Lake Mohagan was twelve miles the other side of Clinton. When he finally turned into the winding private road leading up to Martha's cabin, he was right on schedule. He pulled to a stop just before he came to the low place in the road that was always muddy —he had no intention of leaving telltale tire tracks in the wet earth—and turned the coupe around. Ten minutes later, trembling in spite of himself, he came slipping back through the trees. She hadn't said anything before he struck her down, she had just stood there, looking at him as if she couldn't believe what was happening.

He had one bad moment. Just as he started to get into the car, three youngsters with berry pails came out of a thicket a hundred yards away and called to him, pointing to their containers of fruit. He had twisted quickly, hoping that they hadn't got a good look at his face, jumped into the car, and tore off down the driveway. As he roared back to Clinton, he kept telling himself that they had been too far away to see him clearly, and that small black business coupes driven by pudgy middle aged men with bald heads were so common as to be almost worthless for identification purposes. Their testimony could make things a bit difficult, but with two witnesses to testify that he was talking on the telephone at home just a few minutes

before Martha had been killed fifty-two miles away, it would be impossible to make a case against him.

He kept the accelerator to the floor all the way back and by 1:30 he was in his own living room. He quickly removed the tape recorder with its reel of carefully timed dialogue and the compact but complicated apparatus that connected it to the telephone and hid them in the closet. There would be time later to disassemble the whole thing and restore the component parts to the trays and bins that lined the walls of his workshop. Right now he had to complete his alibi.

By cutting across the pasture and over the hill, he was able to reach the Barton's in five minutes. It was 1:40 when he rang their front door bell. A moment later he heard old Mrs. Barton shuffling through the hall and then the door opened.

"Why Mr. Slussen, this is a surprise. Won't you come in?"

He forced his thin lips into a smile and shook his head. "Thanks just the same but I'm leaving for the lake in the morning and I've got an awful lot to do before then. I just stopped over to see if I could borrow a couple of eggs for breakfast. Martha stocked the pantry before she left but it's kind of bare now."

"Of course! You just wait one minute and I'll have them for you." A moment later she was back with a brown paper bag. "I put in a piece of cake, too. You can have it with your supper." A look of sudden concern came over her face. "You do have enough in for that, don't you?"

He nodded, anxious to get away. Once the estate was settled he'd be able to go someplace where he'd never have to talk to anybody again. "Martha left a lot of cans of things." He looked at his watch. "1:43. Guess I'd better get back and get to work. Thanks again."

He turned and was half way down the steps when Mrs. Barton called after him.

"Were you surprised by your anniversary present?"

He turned quickly.

"Martha explained the whole thing to me just before she left," the fat old woman said. "She said she didn't want me to think she was being unneighborly—but the

one thing you wanted more than anything else in the world was privacy, and she was going to see that you got it." She chuckled. "I'll bet you couldn't figure out what was going on when you saw the truck drive up."

Slussen gripped the railing so tightly that his knuckles showed white. There was a constriction in is chest and a cold and sudden sweat on his face. "What truck?" he demanded hoarsely. "I didn't see any truck!"

"Why the one from the telephone company. It came by here about eleven this morning heading for your place and came back a little before noon. You must have seen the man on the pole when they were switching you over to a private line. If I'd known they were going to put it in so soon I'd a busted right in while you were talking to Martha this morning and wished you both a happy anniversary. Did she call back this noon like she said she would?"

"No," said Albert Slussen dully. "No, she didn't. I guess something came up."

As he walked back down the hill he kept seeing the children coming out of the berry patch.

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SAUL FENICHEL
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me, this 9th day of September, 1959.
Sidney B. Miller
My Commission Expires March 30, 1960.

PIROPOS AT MIDNIGHT

"TOOTLE-LOO, sweetheart!"

Maximo Roldan turned in his tracks, astonished. A *piropo**— in open violation of the law? The author of the comment must have been hopelessly insane to expose himself in this way to imprisonment. Roldan looked this way and that without discovering anyone nearby. Nonetheless, he had not been mistaken. The *piropo* had been pronounced no more than a few feet away. Yet the only person in sight was the police officer on duty at the corner up ahead.

Maximo Roldan continued on, and two steps further along:

"What inviting eyes!"

This time the *piropo* was articulated in a louder tone, with all the enthusiasm that the expression required. Even the policeman at the corner couldn't have failed to hear it. And he didn't fail to hear it. Maximo Roldan realized that he was picking up his lantern and approaching him with slow steps.

The next thing heard was:

"What a graceful walk!"

The policeman reached Maximo Roldan and lifted his lantern to head level.

"Who are you saying these things to?"

"Me? To no one."

The policeman looked all about him. His scrutiny covered the entire length of the street, from one sidewalk to the other, and only on down the street, about a hundred yards away, could he discern any people.

Then it came again:

"Ah, for just a single glimpse from your adorable eyes..."

"Now, look here!" exclaimed the policeman indignantly. But immediately he became aware that the voice could not be that of Maximo Roldan. And now he looked behind him, in front of him, above him. No one. Not a window, not a balcony, not even a door was nearby. Even the rooftops were some thirty feet above them. And the *piropos* —or whatever they were— were clearly originating not more than a few feet away.

"Well! What do you make of this?" he said finally, bewildered, abandoning his visual search.

And, annoyed, he took his lantern, walked back to the corner, and resumed his post.

Then the situation changed somewhat. Instead of a *piropo*, out into the night air floated:

"Hey, chief!"

And since this allusion was unmistakably direct, the of-

ficer returned to where Roldan stood.

"Well," said the policeman. "It appears to me that..."

"It appears to me," interrupted Maximo Roldan, "that robbers are at work under your very nose, and you don't even realize it."

"Eh?"

"I said there's a robbery going on! Can't you hear? Take out your gun and follow me. Leave your lantern behind! The lan—tern! You'd scare them off, don't you see? Get rid of it and let's hurry. Don't worry, even if it's smashed to bits when you get back, leave it! That's right! Now, got your gun ready? Come on. Wait a minute, don't make so much noise! Quietly now."

They rounded the corner.

"Do you have your night stick?"

"Yes."

"Let me have it."

The policeman held out the club to Roldan. He was holding the pistol before him with one hand, and was automatically complying with what the other man ordered.

"Keep pointing the gun straight ahead. Over this way, toward the window and the doorway. That's it. Careful now. Something's moving in the window. Quickly, they're leaving!"

The moment he had come around the corner, Roldan saw the nearby window and the door which the building lacked on the other side. Two men were now slipping out of the window, trying to reach the ground with their dangling toes. At that same moment, scarcely a yard away, the door opened and another man appeared, coming out of the doorway backwards struggling with some bulky object he was carrying.

In a flash, Roldan was beneath the window, and the policeman was standing near the door.

"Tell them to put up their hands. If they try to escape, shoot. That's it. Good and high. And you there, friend, drop that bundle on the ground. There we are. Now up with your hands. Come over this way a little more. Over here with your friends."

The three men, with their arms raised, lined up in a row before Roldan. "Got them covered?" he asked.

"Right."

"If they make a move, you'll fire, eh?"

"That's right."

"Excellent. Now I'll search them."

Roldan went over to the robbers and began a thorough search of one after the other.

He turned all their pockets inside out, and minutely examined their clothing and their hats.

"*Caramba!* Haven't they got anything? You fellows must have l i f t e d something... Well, let's see. Ah, in this bundle perhaps. But that scarcely seems possible. Put the money into a bundle with a load of other things... Other things, I say, because this can't all be money..."

It was at this precise moment when the second policeman appeared. Roldan, bending over the bundle lying near the door, heard a voice speak up from directly behind him:

"Can I help out here, friend?"

This was the first indication of the presence of the other policeman. Of the *other* policeman, since Roldan's first companion remained mute, his revolver trained on the three criminals, unmoved by any occurrence. He was the perfect incarnation of the iron-nerved man to whom nothing comes as a surprise.

There was a moment of thunderous silence, which Roldan finally shattered.

"*Hombre!*" You must have been dropped right out of heaven... Help me? Are you serious? Help with what? Don't you see that there are only three of them? And my partner, see how he's got them all in the sights of his gun? Why he alone could handle the whole bunch. But, if you wish...or, wait a minute. Look here. I'll have to go into the building again to see if there's anyone else in there. Do you have a gun? You do? Let me have it. Just for a minute, a few seconds, while I skip in and right back out."

Roldan had gradually been approaching as he talked, and he held out his hand to receive the pistol. The other fellow scarcely had time to make a move to refuse him, since Roldan's hand had already closed around the gun butt and, giving a jerk, he pulled the weapon out of its holster.

"There we are," continued the determined c h a t t e r e r. "Now who was it who lugged this bundle out?... What muscles you must have, friend. I congratulate you. All right, now. Partner?"

"What is it?"

"Before I go into the building, I want to explain something to you. Are you listening?"

"Sure."

"Very good. But listen very carefully to what I say. It could be very serious if you

missed what I'm going to tell you."

"Don't worry, sir."

"O.K. Do you remember the moment when we first heard the *piropos?*"

"Yes."

"There wasn't anyone along the street who could have spoken them, right?"

"Just you and I."

"But neither you nor I uttered them. And there weren't any doors or windows that they could have come from. So unless a miracle was taking place... Do you believe in miracles?"

"Do you, sir?"

"No."

"Well, I don't either."

"All right. Then it was not a question of a miracle. Nevertheless, the *piropos* could be heard near us. If there was on the other hand, a thing nearby. Do you remember what thing was near us?"

"No, sir."

"Don't you remember what you placed your lantern on?"

"My lantern?"

"Yes. On top of what did you leave the lantern?"

"Well—sir, on top of—of—on top of the garbage can."

"And inside the garbage can a man may fit perfectly well. That was where the voice came from. A hole cut in the side of the can allowed his voice to be heard quite clearly."

"Caramba! Why didn't we think of looking there?"

"Why should we have done that? The important thing to be understood was what the purpose was of the owner of that voice. It was heard too clearly, too loud, too strong and sure to have belonged to a man in a drunken condition. Now then, I was the only person passing by that spot. I hesitated to accept that the *piropos* were directed to me. And the only other person who could possibly have heard them was you. Therefore, not being directed at me, they were intended for you."

"For me?" exclaimed the policeman with not a little alarm.

"Don't get upset, friend. They were for you, but not because of the gracefulness of your walk. It was a question simply of getting your attention, distracting you, in short, of making you abandon your corner. When a disturbance breaks out in the street, it's your duty to intercede; and you have the same duty when you hear someone drop a *piropo* in the street. The purpose of the whole thing, then, began to become clear in my mind: it was an effort to lure you to a spot from which you

would not have the same field of vision as at your post. Stationed near the garbage can, you could discern everything up and down that one street. On the other hand, there hidden from view was the street that passed in front, at right angles. It was only reasonable to assume that the dirty work was being carried out there.

"What dirty work, sir?"

"The robbery, my good chap! Don't you even understand what I'm saying to you?"

"Why, yes, of course. Continue."

"When at one moment you tried to return to your post, the voice cried. "Hey, chief!"

"Yes, that's right."

"There's no longer any doubt in my mind that the object of the *piropos* was to lure you away and prevent your seeing what was happening on the street that was then out of sight to you. For that reason I deemed it fitting to say that there was a robbery going on under your very nose. And you can see now how right I was."

The policeman continued waving his gun towards the criminals. He was not, however, the only person hanging on Maximo Roldan's words. The other policeman and the three captives were also listening with great interest. "And now, my friend, remember that you left your lantern on top of the can? Well go and take a look... It's probably smashed to bits.

"Smashed—to bits?"

"Certainly. Do you think that the person inside was planning to stay there all his life? On raising the lid to get out, the lantern must have toppled to the ground. Go ahead and see. I'll wait here, I'll wait here, that is, *we'll* wait here guarding these men. Why don't you leave me your pistol? That's fine, thanks."

The policeman handed over his revolver to Roldan, and hurried off to the corner. He arrived there, went around it quickly and suddenly there was heard a cry of surprise, and the noise of footsteps that receded at a full run.

"I'm sorry," said Roldan, addressing the three men who were standing with their hands held high. "I'm afraid that if he catches up with your friend he'll settle accounts over the broken lantern... Well, that bundle stays here... You fellows can go... Yes, I mean it... You can go... T a k e o f f... Straight down this street, without turning your heads.

Hurry up, before the other policeman gets back..."

The three men didn't bother even to lower their arms, but started walking away, quickened their step, and finally decided to run. In the meantime, Roldan had approached the other policeman.

"You're staying here, my friend. Or rather you're going with me... Come along."

He slipped his gun hand into his pocket and pressed it against the policeman's back.

"Come on. Just keep in mind that I've got this pistol nudging you. Any fast move and I'll shoot. Do I make myself clear? Good... Tell me now why you made the unfortunate move of appearing when you did. To save the bundle? You've seen how little it means to me. Perhaps you did it in the hope of rescuing your companions. In a policeman's uniform you can accomplish many things, to be sure. But you made a miscalculation. When a policeman arrives he is always accompanied by the loudest racket possible. And you showed up on the spot so quietly—as if you had been dropped from heaven. And I commented on that fact, eh—that you seemed to have dropped right out of the sky. But you see now, don't you, my friend, that neither the other policeman nor I believe in miracles. No, heaven doesn't drop down policemen: so that in order to have appeared as you did, you had to have come out of the open doorway. And as far as I was concerned, everyone who came stealthily out of that doorway was a criminal. So you see that not for even a minute did you fool me into thinking that you were anything but a robber disguised as a policeman."

The two were strolling along in the most natural of fashions. The man who walked with Roldan, having completely forgotten his situation, was carefully taking in the things he was hearing. He ventured to speak:

"*Diablo!* People like you, on the police force, are going to give us nothing but trouble!"

"My good fellow! Who told you I was on the police force? On the contrary! On the contrary! Possibly you didn't see how I allowed your friends to escape. And didn't you notice how I arranged for the other policeman to go off unarmed, in order to save you all some trouble. A member of the police force!... *Vaya!*... But you'll see... When I determined that you, too, were a robber, I understood immediately why the others didn't

have any money on them... This had seemed very strange to me: why should they have put the money, which was so easy to carry in one's pockets, into a big awkward bundle which was unwieldy and dangerous to boot. Only if they were a bunch of bumbling idiots would they have done a thing like that. Nevertheless, I started to have a look through the bundle, because I never doubted that besides the objects you were making off with in the bundle, you were coming away with money, too. So, I was just about to examine the contents of the bundle when you appeared—right out of the blue. Without a doubt a robber dressed as a policeman is the person one least suspects; and, for that reason, he is the one in whose hands stolen money is the safest. So now, will you please give me the money."

From this moment on the other man appeared aroused from his dreams. The first sign was a shudder that ran the length of his body. Then he turned to Maximo Roldan and regarded him for a moment. Finally, he said:

"Do you actually believe that I'm going to hand over the money to you? Now that's the limit!"

"I think you're forgetting that I have a gun pointed at you," replied Roldan quickly. "And it's a rather important thing to forget. It would be no trouble at all for me to squeeze the trigger... I wouldn't even be held for it... An astute policeman and I capture a band of robbers, and as they try to escape, I fire a shot wounding, or killing one of them—the leader, perhaps. It would be very easy to explain. And it goes without saying that it would be equally effortless for me to take over the money so that I may conveniently disappear and you may go off to wherever you wish? Doesn't this seem reasonable?"

The other man fought with himself for a brief instant, still undecided. Then, slowly, he indicated with his arm a spot on his breast and said:

"In this pocket are the bills; in my pants pockets you'll find gold."

"Much obliged," declared Maximo Roldan. "And now I shall issue you a receipt which you may show to your companions. Write the following: 'Received from *senor*—put your name in here—all the proceeds obtained in this evening's undertaking.' Now the date, and right below it—my signature."

helping hand

by **ROBERT ANDREA**

BEING a free-lance English teacher in Tokyo has its ups and downs. There are times when you think that half of the city's population is walking around telling the other half of the city's population what a terrific teacher you are. And on the other side, there are spells when you'd swear that a special committee of citizens has publicly denounced you as the lousiest teacher in Tokyo.

Free-lance English teaching, by the way, is nothing more than teaching English pronunciation (and whatever else you might know about the language) to anyone who is willing to pay to learn it. It's surprising, though, how many different kinds of people you run into. Bankers, business executives, musicians, cabaret girls, pimps, and even, sometimes, other teachers of English. As I said, though, it can be a difficult life—just as any other kind of free-lance work. When you hit one of those stages during which you can't seem to get a pupil, no matter how hard you try, you start to wonder where the next meal will come from, especially if your bank balance

is as small as mine.

That's why I found it necessary, some time ago, to have a little sideline. You know, something I can count on to bring in the chips when no one seems to be interested in learning English. Now I admit that the sideline I'm in might be considered a bit shady, or even more than that, by certain narrow-minded persons. But— Excuse me a minute, the phone is ringing.

"Hello? Yes, this is Mr. Shearing. What's that? Oh, Mrs. Yamanaka. How are you? Fine. Is Saburo studying the lesson I gave him? He's not? What seems to be the trouble? Hm-m-m. I see. I'm certainly sorry to hear that. Pardon? You want me to talk to him? You think he respects me. Well, Mrs. Yamanaka, I'll certainly do my best. Yes, send him right over. I'll be waiting for him."

That was Mrs. Yamanaka, the mother of one of my pupils. It seems that she caught her son Saburo taking dope—heroin, I guess—and she thinks that I might be able to help straighten him out. I usually dislike getting involved in the personal problems of my students, but this kid Saburo is a real sharp young man, and, frankly, I'd hate to see him fall by the wayside if it can be avoided. I like the kid. He's got a lot of spunk.

He should be over in a few minutes. Their home is only a few blocks away from the apartment house I'm living in.

Now, to get back to what I was talking about. I have, as I said, found it necessary to have what might be called an insurance job, s o m e t h i n g that's a sure-fire thing. And, as I also mentioned, it's the type of work that policemen and other highly moral people have decided is illegal. But I maintain that a man has a right to do what he wants, provided he doesn't hurt anyone else, without being bothered by the law. That's why I can't see anything too wrong with— Pardon me, there's the doorbell. That must be Saburo.

"Hello, Saburo. Come right in. Have a seat. That chair on your left is real comfortable."

"Thank you, Mr. Shearing," Saburo says quietly, sitting down and burying his head in his hands. He's a big fellow for a Japanese, and his un-

kempt hair, flat nose and thick eyebrows make him a rather handsome lad.

"Now look, Saburo," I say, "there's nothing to be ashamed about. We all have our vices."

Saburo slowly looks up at me. "I did not want my mother to know," he says. "And I did not want you to know, either. I wanted—that you respect me."

"Don't worry about that, son. I still respect you. Tell me, how long have you been taking the stuff?"

"Not too long. I only have about four or five shots. My mother caught me in bedroom when I was taking last one. I think I wanted that she catch me."

"Well, in a way I'm glad to hear that. You're not addicted yet—not with just four or five shots, and if you try hard enough, you should be able to break off from the stuff."

"I hope so," Saburo says. "I—I guess I make mistake to take any in first place. It's friends I have. Most of them taking it, and they always saying I afraid to take it. Finally I give in."

"The best way to stop, then, is to quit running around with that crowd," I tell the youngster. "You come from a good family, Saburo. You shouldn't have much trouble finding some decent friends, if you work at it. Now how about it, are you going to try?"

"Yes, I think so, Mr. Shearing. I—I think I just not type to be 'tough guy'."

"You can be tough without being foolish, Saburo."

"I think that is true," Saburo says. "Anyway, I very sorry to bothered you with my troubles." Saburo gets up from the chair and heads for the door.

"That's quite all right," I say. "I only hope that this little talk does some good. If you need any more help, feel free to call upon me. After all, you *are* my prize pupil!"

Saburo forces a smile and opens the door.

"Goodbye for a while, Saburo, and be sure to do that homework I gave you."

"Goodbye, Mr. Shearing. And thank you much for your help. *Domo arigato gozaimashita.*"

Saburo has left. Now, to get back to that sideline of mine I was telling you about—the one that's illegal. In a way

you might say that I'm ashamed of it, but after all, folks, a guy has to make a living. This little talk with Saburo sort of makes me feel like a— Excuse me, the telephone is ringing again.

"Hello? Look, Jim, I told you not to call me at my home! I don't care what's come up, you'll have to contact me by mail if you want me to help you out. Damn it, isn't it enough I fly to Hong Kong and get the stuff for you? Do I have to push it, too? You know I want to keep my reputation clean. I can't afford to get as involved in the operation as some of your punks. All right, all right, so I'm a gutless lizard. Now look, if you keep bothering me at home like this, I'm going to drop out of the organization completely. What do you mean what will I do to make a living? Don't forget, I'm an English teacher, I've got quite a listing of pupils. I'm a what? Oh, go to hell, Jim!"

TEEN AGE GANGS IN SINGAPORE

Readers of newspapers here in the East will sympathize with police authorities in Singapore who are faced with a situation where teenagers are rising to power in the Singapore underworld, striving to outdo one another in terrorism.

The weapons? Only a few of them use guns. The troubles in Malaya have made them difficult to obtain. But there is the parang, a type of cutglass intended for use as a bush knife or machete. And they have home-made spears and clubs, knuckle dusters, motor-cycle chains (a familiar note) and acid bombs.

Using these when there is need for persuasion, they exact tribute from tens of thousands of people in all walks of life, storekeepers, farmers, waterfront contractors, small businessmen, minor crooks, bar girls and prostitutes (who are killed or injured for life if they fail to pay "protection") and wealthy businessmen, whom they threaten with kidnapping.

Teenagers have now assumed command in many of the gangs, the police report. Many of them had no records before the scramble for power that followed the arrest of several hundred of the older gangsters. Before they could rise to the top, however, they had to prove their "bravery". Hence the increase— the marked increase — in crimes of violence.

Sounds familiar?

THE saint's RATINGS

Things are looking up —

OUR RATING SYSTEM:	
★ ★ ★ ★	Four stars: Outstanding
★ ★ ★	Three stars: Above Average
★ ★	Two stars Passable reading
★	One star: For the ash can

as the man said when he opened the case of pickled fish eyes. After a steady diet of pitchforks, your reviewer has enough iron in his system now to cry rusty tears at the sight of two stars. So he is greatly cheered that this month's books indicate a marked change for the better. It cannot be chance alone that the top two are steeped in enough acid satire to quickly burn holes in the thin-skinned. The humorous mystery story is not new, though it usually indulges in whimsy and straight jokery. Both good enough for normal times. But we live in a ragged world these days, and the only way to handle that sort of thing is with satire — as Swift and Volitaire proved some years back. Himes and Duncan wield more modern, but still wicked and poisonous pens. So heed this warning. If you read them and don't laugh — well... there is a good chance they're writing about you.

THE REAL COOL KILLERS, by Chester Himes (Avon, 35c)
Those improbable detectives of FOR LOVE OF IMABELLE are back. Shooting and shouting their way through a madman's version of Harlem. Funny, incredible, sadistic, bloody, tragic and always interesting. Miss this one at your own risk. ★ ★ ★ ★

SWEET CHEAT, by Peter Duncan (Dell, 25c)
The hero is a psalm-singing hyprocrite — and you love him for it. A smiling indictment of small town morals and sexual habits that pivots on a murder, but keeps turning under its own power.
★ ★ ★

THE LINEUP, by Frank Kane (Dell, 35c)
Taken from the TV show of the same name — and luckily taken far enough away to stay readable. The story is the worst where it resembles the program the most. The rest of the time Kane manages to produce a book of his usual caliber. ★ ★

MAKE MINE VENGEANCE, by Robert Colby (Avon, 25c)
A fairly preposterous story of gangland, bedable girls and an honest man's revenge. Since the author never promises more than he can deliver, inertia will carry the reader through to the end. ★ ★

BLONDE BAIT, by Stephen Marlow (Avon, 35c)
If you take the bait — watch out for the hook! ★

SHOCK TREATMENT, by James Hadley Chase (Signet, 25c)
Now I've had the treatment. You'd be wise to avoid it. ★

hitch hiker

by HARRY HARRISON

THE NEEDLE on the gas gauge was touching *empty*, Kleg looked at it and cursed and knew he would have to stop and refill the tank. It took an effort to make his foot leave the floor-tight accelerator and move over to the brake. Every minute and every mile put him that much further ahead of them, gave him that much more of a chance. But the tank had to be filled.

From horizon to horizon the road stretched, empty and shimmering with the late afternoon heat waves. One spot was as good as another to stop in that monotonous desert of mesquite and cactus. Now that he had made up his mind to stop he wanted to do it fast and get it over with. The tires squealed as he j a m m e d the brake, then stones grumbled and rattled against the fenders as he turned off onto the shoulder. With a final lurch the car stopped and was immediately enveloped in a slowly settling cloud of dust. The silence was intense after the constant roar of the engine.

Kleg took a look at the back seat; the baby was still asleep, rocking gently in the

canvas car bed. With a little luck he could get the job done and start moving again before he woke up. The tear stains on the puffy face didn't bother Kleg, he was only glad that after crying for over three hours the baby had finally shut up and fallen asleep.

Easing the trunk lid open, he pulled out the first five gallon jeep can, then twisted the lid off the gas tank. The funnel gurgled and the sick reek of gasoline hung in the hot air. The third can filled the tank and he pushed the empties back into the trunk.

Inside of him, the urge to get moving again was like a sick knot. But he forced himself to move slowly and check everything. He had planned too carefully to foul up the deal by doing something stupid now. The Texas heat had baked half the water out of the radiator and he pulled out the can to refill it.

It gurgled wetly, slapping a thick stream against the core. Then the can slipped off the hood, he tried to catch it but he wasn't fast enough, it fell towards the ground.

A thin brown hand came from behind Kleg and picked up the can.

Kleg started in spite of himself and reached towards his side pocket. He stopped the motion just in time and switched the movement to the can. When he turned slowly he saw the small Mexican standing in the dust behind him.

White pants and a faded blue work shirt. Rubber-tire soled, rawhide topped *guaraches* on his bare feet. He took his hat off when Kleg looked at him and held it in front of his chest. He smiled, a wide grin that split his face and moved the flesh over his high Indian cheekbones until his eyes were half closed.

"Would you please give me a lift, Senor?"

A hitch-hiker. Kleg slowly let the air out of his lungs and turned to finish filling the radiator. When he had put the cap back on and closed the hood, he turned back to face the man who still stood there, still grinning with the patient hat across his chest.

"All right, get in the front with me."

Kleg had made his mind up fast, but he had made it up right. The Mex was just a hitch-hiker—but he had seen

the car and he could talk to someone else. Take him along now and worry about him later. Time now...time. His gut burned with the urge to get moving.

Clumsy now with urgency, he fumbled and jammed the can back into the trunk and slammed it closed. The engine coughed, then roared; the wheels spun in the gravel for a second, then they were back on the running ribbon of black road.

The Mexican hitch-hiker sat quietly in the far corner of the seat against the door, his hands together on his lap. Now that the car was burning north on the road, Kleg could relax and think.

What about the Mex?

Stealing quick glimpses out of the corner of his eyes, he looked the man over. Young, probably not yet twenty. But you couldn't tell with Mexs. The clothes, the way he sat and everything else about the Mex seemed straight enough. A farmhand or sharecropper, maybe only a few years in the country. There wouldn't be any trouble here. When he dropped the hitch-hiker off—that would be the only time to worry. And there was plenty of time yet.

The hitch-hiker turned and saw Kleg glancing at him. He smiled his friendly smile and Kleg looked back to the road.

Nothing to worry about here. Probably s t u p i d as a goat, too.

But Kleg loosened the gun in his left hip pocket so he could get it out fast. Even though his mind was made up, Kleg was still cautious.

They did thirty miles without talking, w i t h o u t any sound except for the baby's occasional moan in his sleep from the back seat. Kleg didn't want to talk and the hitch-hiker was very polite and did not talk until he was spoken to.

Then Kleg asked him if he came from this part of the country and the hitch-hiker said *yes, sir*. Kleg asked a few more questions, then he ran out of small talk. The other didn't encourage him to go on, just *yes, sir* or nodded his head. They both liked the silence better and rode that way as the burning sun moved down towards the horizon.

The baby in the back seat cried in his sleep once, but he didn't wake up.

Every few minutes Kleg's

hand would move towards the radio knob, it took all his control to stop it each time. He wanted to listen, had to listen —but the Mex might catch wise. With each slow minute the pressure grew greater, until his hand moved with a mind of its own, snapping on the radio. He had to know what was going on, even if it meant the hitch-hiker would know too.

Quickly he found a news program and listened tensely, scarcely noticing the road. When it was over he snapped the knob off, unable to stop the relaxed sigh that escaped from his lips.

The radio station was in San Antonio north of them, and came in loud and clear across the desert. They had a news broadcast every half hour and Kleg listened to every one.

It was almost dark at 6:30 when he listened to the news again. In the middle of the weather report the announcer broke off suddenly, then started talking again, a new tone in his voice.

"...a special bulletin just in from Laredo, some time earlier today, young Tommy Sanders, age twenty-two months, was..."

Kleg's hand hit the station knob and a flood of tango music washed in from XENT in Mexico, then he snapped the power off.

With quick glances Kleg searched the hitch-hiker's stolid face. *Had he heard...you couldn't tell...you could never tell what these damn Mexs were thinking...* The tension drained slowly from Kleg's arms and legs as the other man kept his eyes on the road ahead. He had just made his mind up that the other had noticed nothing, when the man turned suddenly and smiled at him.

Then he glanced over his shoulder at the boy sleeping in the rear seat.

For ten miles more the car tore across the darkening desert while Kleg's mind went around and around like a dog chasing its tail.

Did he hear it...did he notice...why did he look at the kid like that and smile...that was just a coincidence, it has to be..or was it...?

Too much was at stake to risk taking a chance now. He had planned too long. Since that day in the country club when he heard old man Sand-

ers talking. Kleg had been a bartender then—and who ever notices the bartender? They would have n o t i c e d him quickly enough if they knew he was not from New York, but fresh out of the Illinois Penitentiary. That he had a criminal record dating back twenty years and that he had only taken the bartending job to look for a mark.

He had found the perfect one when he heard Sanders say, "...I don't care what anyone says, I can make more money but I can't bring a baby back to life. If Tommy was kidnapped I would pay *i n s t a n t l y* every cent they asked!" That was all Kleg heard, but it was enough. That had been six months ago, a half a year of careful planning and timing so that nothing could go wrong.

And n o t h i n g would go wrong, he would see to that. The Mex would be dead before he had a chance to make any trouble.

It was dark now and the light from the dash lit up the soft angles of the hitch-hiker's face. He was still watching the road, his hands resting in his lap. The man's quiet position had a calming effect on Kleg. He still couldn't be sure about the Mex, but he would be easy to keep an eye on. The gun was a hard weight in his pocket and he almost wished the Mex would try something so they could settle it once and for all. But nothing happened and the tires hummed as the car moved east at a steady ninety miles an hour.

The diner lights were an orange spot next to the highway, miles ahead. As soon as Kleg spotted them he realized how hungry he was. He had planned to buy sandwiches that morning and put them in the car, but even the thought of food had made him sick then. It was at least twelve hours since he ate last, he had to swallow the saliva that s u d d e n l y filled his mouth. He slowed down as they came near the dilapidated diner and saw that there were no other cars nearby. That decided him. Braking suddenly he stopped the car about thirty yards past the diner. He slipped the keys into his pocket as he climbed out.

"I'm gonna get some hamburgers—you want one too?"

The hitch-hiker nodded and

said, "Yes, sir."

The sleepy looking counterman was alone in the diner. Kleg ordered, and while the burgers were smoking on the grill, he sipped a cup of weak, cool coffee and watched the car. He could see the outline of the hitch-hiker's big hat through the rear window. It moved once or twice but the man didn't try to get out of the car or go near the kid in the back seat.

Carrying the sandwiches back to the car, Kleg stopped suddenly at the sound of a low voice in the car. Moving quietly he slipped up out of sight of the hitch-hiker and heard the tail end of a news broadcast.

"...no further news of the kidnapping of little Tommy Sanders. While State troopers blocked all roads out of Laredo, the kidnapped boy's mother made a tearful plea to the press..."

The hitch-hiker had turned the radio on—he was listening to the news. The gun was in Kleg's hand and his finger quivering, tightening on the trigger. He took a step forward before he got himself under control. This wasn't the way to do it—not here on the highway next to the diner. Putting the gun away he went back about fifty feet on the road then stepped off onto the gravel shoulder.

This time the gravel was loud under his feet as he approached the car, and the radio was turned off when he got there. They ate the hamburgers in silence, then he threw the papers out of the window and started the engine. When they were moving down the highway again Kleg made a careful plan.

That was the way he always did it, made a good plan and stuck to it. The hitch-hiker had caught wise—now he would have to pay for it. He might even be a plainclothes cop, but that wouldn't make any difference. The chances were, though, that he wasn't. Just a hitch-hiker who had been too nosey for his own good. He had guessed who the baby in the back seat was and then listened to the news just to make sure. Probably shout to the first cop they came to or call them on the phone as soon as he got out. Well he wasn't g o i n g to get the chance. They were almost to the border, and just across the line in Louisiana was the cab-

in he had fixed up for a hide-out. He would take care of the Mex there. No, better do it now. As soon as they were away from any buildings he would pull off the road and let the .38 do all the talking.

The highway ran through a small town, Kleg kept the speed down and tried to control his impatience. A few minutes more. They would be through the town and out in the country again. Just a few minutes more.

The road made a slow turn and he could see a junction with another road up ahead. He had just started to pour on the gas when he spotted the car parked at the junction and the two uniformed men just stopping a car ahead of him.

Kleg acted fast—because he had even planned for this too. Twisting hard on the wheel he bumped into an empty lot next to a dark store. There was a dirt road about a mile back that would take him around the road block. That was the plan.

The sudden turn had thrown the baby against the side of the car bed and he woke up screaming. The sudden noise rattled Kleg and he killed the engine putting the car into reverse. He cursed and thumbed the starter and its high whine mixed with the baby's yells.

Kleg almost forgot about the hitch-hiker—but not quite. Even with the baby screaming and the dead engine and the cops just around the corner, he found time to shoot a glance at the Mex.

The hitch-hiker was looking at the baby in the back seat and his hand was going into the front of his loose shirt.

There was a bulge there, right at the waist and Kleg cursed himself for a sucker. The Mex had a gun and he had just been waiting for the right chance to use it. His hand fumbled for a second then started to draw it out. He was fast but Kleg was faster.

It was hard to get the .38 out sitting down, and then he had to fire with the steering wheel jabbing him, but he did it. The gun boomed like a cannon inside the car and the slug that should have gone through his head crashed through the window instead.

There was no plan now, Kleg just knew that he had to

get out fast. He tried to swing the door shut and start the car at the same time, and he did both of them badly. Someone shouted and a car engine started and he slammed it into second, breaking the tires loose and jumping the car forward.

He was too late. The police car was in front of him and he slammed into it.

The gun was still in his hand and he managed to get one shot off at the two men who were piling out of the car.

Just one shot. The tall man with the big Stetson was out of the police car on the far side. His gun came up with a slow speed and his single bullet went through Kleg's head.

The two troopers moved ahead warily through the settling dust.

The hitch-hiker lay on the ground and talked to trooper Perez in soft liquid Spanish while his side was being bandaged up. Trooper Abbott came towards them carrying Tommy Sanders who had finally stopped crying and was sucking his thumb.

"This is the kid, all right," Abbott said. "He fits the description they sent over the wire. The big punk is dead—how is this one doing?"

"He'll be all right, just a hole in his shoulder, too high to do much damage."

"What does he say—why did the big guy shoot him?"

Trooper Perez shrugged his shoulders in a swift Latin gesture. "He doesn't know, he thinks the guy was crazy. All he knows is that he hitched a ride from the guy just this side of the Rio Grande, and they were having a fine trip until this guy suddenly shot him."

"That sounds screwier than hell," Abbott said. "Didn't the kidnapper say anything to him?"

"He wouldn't know if the guy did. He's a wetback who just came across the river, all he can speak is Spanish. Says he paid a man in Tamaulipas ten pesos and the man taught him to say *Would you please give me a lift senor* and *yes sir*. That way he could get a lift and get away from the border before he was spotted."

The man on the ground broke in with a flood of words. Perez listened and nodded sympathetically, then turned back to Abbott.

"He doesn't understand

what happened or why he was shot, all he wants to do is get back to Morelos and away from crazy *gringos* forever. At first the big guy was so friendly, played music on the radio in the car and even stopped and bought them both something to eat. He felt very grateful to him, so when the baby started to cry he wanted to help. He had a hunk of nice, sweet sugar cane stuck in his belt and he started to give it to the kid. That's when the guy shot him."

Trooper Abbott scratched his head in thought for a moment, then settled his big hat down with finality.

"Just a screwball I guess. He's dead now so I suppose we'll never know why the hell he did it."

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NIGHT WALK

HE SAW the redhead the moment he entered the hotel lounge. She was sitting alone, at the far end of the bar, nursing a drink—and he knew what she was. The revealing, skin-tight dress told the story. That and the faint, inviting smile she gave him.

Willard Broun met her eyes for a brief instant, then turned away, breathing deeply, controlling the sudden dark hatred that had welled up within him.

No, he told himself, not tonight. Not here, in this fresh new city. No, no...

"And what's yours, sir?"

Willard Broun looked up at the smiling face of the bartender. "Well...I'd like a whiskey sour, please."

The bartender moved away.

Don't think about her, he told himself. He looked at his carefully manicured hands on the polished bartop, then slowly raised his eyes to the gleaming mirror behind the bar. Yes, by God, she was watching him. She had her lipstick out and pretended to be making up her face, but he could see her knowing eyes, watching him over the thin gold edge of her compact. In another moment she'd be coming over, walking casually, swaying toward him in that tight black dress. Then he'd ask her to sit down; he'd begin to talk to her and...

"Hey, mister," the bartender called. "Your change!"

"Keep it," snapped Willard Broun, moving quickly out of the room. He did not look at her as he passed, but he could almost *feel* the thin, cold smile on her face.

Outside, along the quiet pavement of Carondelet Street, the air was moist and heavy, typical of New Orleans in July. Willard Broun drew the warm Gulf air into his lungs.

He liked this town. He'd been here for two days now, had roamed the narrow French Quarter, eaten at the Court of Two Sisters, taken the Algiers Ferry across the brown Mississippi and walked the twisting length of the City Park lagoon under the immense trees, heavy with hanging moss. It had all been fresh and wonderful.

Now he moved toward the heart of the city, toward Canal, passing silent, darkened shops and tall, iron-lace balconies, hands in the pockets of his white linen coat.

And as he walked he remembered a girl called Abbe in Chicago—a slender-bodied smiling girl with a lilt in her voice, a kind of music in the way she spoke. But she'd been like the rest of them; she'd been cheap and easy and of course she had to die. They were standing together, late at night, under the dark shadow of the El when her lilting voice had suddenly stopped and she had stumbled loosely forward against his chest. He could still feel the warmth of her body and the cold, unyielding handle of the knife. After he'd cleaned the blade he had given it to a newsboy who thanked him; the boy's knife was old and the handle had cracked. He remembered the way the boy had smiled.

And he remembered Irene: loud and vulgar, with stale whiskey on her breath. He'd picked her up in a St. Louis bar and they had gone to his apartment. Irene, with her supple, pink-thighed body and raucous voice demanding payment. But she had been the one who'd paid. The redhead back at the hotel would be like Irene: nice at first, then not so nice.

A taxi glided by, tail lights fading into the darkness like two red eyes as it moved toward Canal Street.

It had been nearly two weeks since Linda. She'd been a waitress in a place called Al's. Near the railroad tracks in one of those little sun-blistered Texas towns. The trains would come bulleting past, on their way across country, rumbling and jolting by in heavy iron thunder, shaking the dusty plate-glass windows and jittering the cups and saucers. How he had hated those t r a i n s, shattering the night when he was trying to talk to Linda, trying to u n d e r s t a n d her. The engine would scream for the crossing, and he'd close his eyes tight until it was silent. Then, finally, Linda had screamed like the trains: a long, high scream. And after that she was silent—the way the tracks were silent after the trains had gone...

No, thought Willard Broun, *stop* it! Don't keep thinking about them. Not tonight at least. Not tonight.

Canal Street lay before him, wide and bright-lit by many overhead lamps. He could see Bourbon Street a block ahead,

with its gaudy neons beckoning the jaded pleasure-seeker, promising all manner of dark excitement.

Willard Broun moved toward the yellows and the reds and the greens, his step firm on the night pavement, his mouth dry.

A highball will taste good, he thought; it will taste fine.

Mingling with the crowds, he moved leisurely down the narrow stone walks of Bourbon Street, past Prima's 500, the Sho-Bar and Stormey's. The hawkers were in front of every club, gesturing and winking, holding open the swing doors for a tantalizing view of the stripper onstage. "Here ya are, buddy. Step inside. Most beautiful girls on Bourbon. Step right in, chum. The show's continuous."

He ignored their loud comeons, passing each door slowly, in no hurry to make up his mind. The street was crowded and noise-filled. Here Jazz was king; a dozen blaring bands sent out their frenzied music into Bourbon Street, and the sharp, sweet cry of horns could be heard above the rolling trap drums, with the pianos, as clean as ice in a pitcher, behind the brass.

He finally entered a club near the end of the street without bothering to note what it was called. A waitress leaned forward to take his order in the smoke-filled semi-darkness.

"Ginger high," said Willard Broun, and she stepped away.

Onstage, a tall blonde in a low-cut red dress was beginning to weave sinuously to the notes of a muted trumpet. Willard Broun did not watch her.

"All alone, honey?" purred a voice at his elbow.

He glanced coldly at the girl who had taken the empty stool next to him. One of the between-acts strippers. The heavy make-up, the hard eyes with their false lashes, the sequined glitter of the tight dress testified to her trade. He shook his head. "I don't want company."

"But, look, honey..." She was pressing his shoulder.

"Get—away—from—me," said Willard Broun levelly, spacing his words.

"Well, *okay!*" She slipped off the stool and swayed on down the bar. A sweating fatman in thick hornrims grinned and took her hand.

Fool, raged Willard Broun.

Can't you *see* what she is? Can't you see how cheap and rotten they *all* are, how...

He felt the sweat break out beneath his linen suit, felt the familiar darkness welling up. He downed his drink and left hurriedly.

Outside, the music was piercing and discordant; his mind churned and he felt a slight dizziness. Sleep, that was what he needed. He would return to his hotel and go to bed. Yes, that would be fine; that is what he would do.

And then he found the girl.

He'd paused at Canal Street, waiting for the light to change, when he saw her sitting alone on a long wooden bench at the bus stop. Young, not more than nineteen or twenty. And pretty. Very pretty and fresh looking in her light summer dress. She wore her hair short; it was dark and lustrous, perfectly complementing her fair skin. Her breasts were ripe and firm beneath the thin dress and her slender legs tapered down to delicate birdlike ankles.

A beautiful girl, thought Willard Broun, a truly beautiful creature.

Then, speak to her! Ask her something—anything. Her voice must be lovely too. Go ahead...

"Pardon me, Miss," he said, smiling warmly down at her.

She looked up, her eyes luminous and deeply blue. "Yes?"

"I'm a stranger in town, and I was wondering about the busses. There doesn't seem to be a schedule posted—and I wondered how often they ran this time of night." His voice was smooth and sincere, his smile friendly.

She won't doubt me, Willard Broun told himself; they never doubt me.

"Slow after midnight," she told him, her own smile answering his. "One should be along in the next forty minutes though."

"Thank you."

"Quite all right. Always glad to help a stranger," she said, and her eyes fell. The question was taken care of, the conversation done.

She has a voice like Abbe's, Willard Broun marvelled, musical and lilting like Abbe's. But she's not like Abbe and all the others. Not this girl. I'm sure of it.

The others were all the

same; all weak and easy and cheap. Not good as his mother had been. They were all like his stepmother and each time he killed one of them he killed her—over and over and over.

"Cigarette?" asked Willard Broun, seating himself on the bench next to her.

"I don't smoke," she said, "But thanks."

He drew cigarette smoke deeply into his lungs. "New Orleans is certainly a wonderful place, isn't it?"

"I grew up here," the girl said, "and I still love it more than any other city."

She was talking to him now, hesitant at first, then with more confidence. Willard Broun was a handsome man, with the type of open, clean-featured face that inspires immediate trust. His smile was genuine and appealing.

"I'm from Kansas City, myself," he told her. "Too much dirt back there to suit me. I'd like to settle down in this kind of country."

"Oh, you'd never be sorry," she said with conviction. "The South grows on a person."

Willard Broun wondered: what will she do if I ask her to have a drink with me? Of course she'll say no. She's not the kind who'd agree to drink with strangers. She'll say no.

But she didn't.

"Only one," she smiled, "just because it's so hot and because we still have time for one if we hurry."

She simply trusts you, he told himself, taking her arm. She figures you for a friendly, harmless fellow alone in a strange city. Oh, she won't go to your hotel. Not this girl. She'll have her drink and then she'll catch the bus and you'll never see her again. Never.

"They say that right here, in this very building, General Jackson met the pirate, Lafitte, to plot out the battle of New Orleans." She pointed to a narrow wooden stairway. "There's a special room at the top where they met."

He was sitting with her at the bar of the Old Absinthe House and she was telling him the history of Bourbon Street and the French Quarter. She was on her second highball, her face flushed and excited as she described famous places and people.

"This is one of our city's oldest bars," she said, "Mark

Twain used to come here and kings and presidents and all."

"It's very colorful," he agreed. "Guess there must be ten thousand calling cards tacked up around here."

"Everyone is supposed to leave one," she said, gesturing to the walls and ceiling, covered over by a white snowfall of paper. "Do you have a calling card?"

"Sorry," he smiled.

"Then we'll just use a napkin," she said, smoothing one out on the bartop. "A lot of people do. Oh, *say!*"

"What's wrong?"

"We haven't even been introduced. Here, I'll write my name and then you can write yours."

In a neat, precise hand she printed: ANNE FERRAR. Then she pushed the napkin to him and extended her pen.

He wrote: FRANK BOUTELL, and returned the pen.

"Fine," she said. "Hi, Frank!"

"Hi, Anne!" They smiled together.

He watched her tack the soft white square of paper to a post and he thought: will she go to my hotel if I ask her now? Another couple of drinks and she'll go fast enough. NO...no she won't. She's not like all the others.

"There," Anne giggled, climbing back on the stool. "Now we're immortal."

He put his hand over hers. "Afraid you've missed the bus."

"Who cares. There'll be another. I'm having *so* much fun, Frank!"

"I'm glad," he said. "Ready for another drink?"

"Sure. Why not!"

Two more and her head was on his shoulder, her dark hair fluffing against his cheek; the scent of her scrubbed skin was sweet...

Willard Broun had begun to hate her. He was thinking of Abbe and Irene and Linda and all the rest. Now, in his mind, Anne was one of them. Anne was no different.

"Say, I've got a keen idea," he said. "A guided tour around New Orleans!"

"But—wouldn't that be terribly expensive, Frank?"

"I can afford it," he assured her. "Will you go?"

Say no, a voice inside him warned her.

"Okay," she smiled. "Only not too far. I don't want to think I've made you spend all your money."

"Wait here," he instructed, squeezing her arm. "I'll call us a taxi."

The cabbie was a mouse-quick little man with sharp eyes that missed nothing. Wise in the ways of his profession, he drove slowly, careful not to disturb the two.

Anne rode with her arm around Willard Broun's waist, sitting close to him in the soft leather seat, pointing out the sights with her free hand, her voice light and high.

A sudden summer rain had begun to fall, and the night buildings glistened under the overhead lights.

They moved up Rampart Street, passing the rain-pearled spire of the Church of St. Anthony, and out Claiborne to the dark, heaving expanse of the Mississippi.

"Don't you love to see rain on the water?" she asked him. "It fascinates me. All the hard little drops cutting into the face of the river like bullets."

"I hate the rain," he told her, his voice cold and slow. "My stepmother used to make me stand out in it naked for hours as punishment. I'd stand there, barefoot and screaming, but the thunder ate up my cries. Sometimes my whole body would go numb until I could no longer feel the rain on my skin."

"How horrible," Anne exclaimed. "Why—you could have caught pneumonia and died."

"She hoped I would," breathed Willard Broun, remembering the hard black eyes of his stepmother. "She always hated me, from the day she stepped into our house, because I was my father's child and not hers."

"What about your real mother?"

"Dead. Passed away when I was seven. She was a real lady. A wonderful, clean, decent person and not like that—" His face hardened. "—that woman he married."

Anne pressed his hand tightly. "Oh, Frank."

The rain thinned, misting away, and the yellow moon rode out free between the dark thunderclouds.

Kiss her, Willard Broun told himself, because she wants what they all want. Go ahead.

When he pressed his lips to hers she didn't try to resist. She murmured softly under his touch.

"Listen, Anne," he whis-

pered, nuzzling the skin along her neck. "How about calling off the tour and having a final nightcap at my hotel. The downstairs bar is still open. All right?"

She nodded and sighed deeply. "All right, Frank."

The bar was crowded and he was taking a risk being seen here with Anne. When they discovered her body in his room they could round up plenty of witnesses who had seen them together. But what did all that matter? By the time Anne was found he'd be gone like smoke in the wind. They'd never find him.

He led her to a small booth in the corner, quiet, away from the lights.

"Do you know you're a nice guy, Frank," she told him, her hands clasped over his on the table. "You're a real nice guy."

And you're a bitch, a voice inside Willard Broun replied. A slut. And you're going to die for being what you are.

He looked up and saw the redhead again, the same one he'd encountered earlier in the evening. She was still at the end of the bar, watching him across the smoky room.

You're no better than she is, Anne Ferrar. No better than that tramp at the bar.

"Salud!" he toasted, holding up his drink.

They clinked glasses and Anne giggled. She set her empty glass down unsteadily.

"This place is like a circus," he said, brushing her ear with his lips. "Let's take the elevator up to my room. We can talk there and I can fix us some fresh drinks."

She nodded and smiled, her eyes half-closed.

The redhead was still watching as they left the bar.

"Here we are, darling," he said, when they were safely inside his apartment. "All the comforts of home."

"It's nice," she sighed, hanging tight to his arm. "Real kind of cozy."

"Martini?"

She plumped herself down on the couch and he noticed that her dress had slipped over her knees. "Yes," she smiled. "And make mine very dry, please."

Look at you, his inner voice accused; your lipstick is smeared and your hair is in your face and half of your thigh is exposed. Well, Anne, now you're beginning to look

like what you really are. Killing you will be a pleasure!

He stepped to the wall radio and switched it on. The measured beat of Chopin's *Bacarolle* drifted through the room. Whistling softly to the music, he mixed two very dry Martinis.

"Thank you, sir?" she said, when he handed one to her.

"To life," said Willard Broun, "and to the decent things in it."

They drank, her large blue eyes meeting his.

Oh, but she's clever, he thought, so damned clever. Putting on her innocent little act and fooling me in the beginning, making me think she was different.

He wouldn't use a knife on Anne. A knife would be too clean for her. She deserved a slower death—one she could see and taste and feel.

Willard Broun looked at his two hands, cupped around the thin glass in front of him. Hard, square-fingered hands. Yes, they could do the job easily. The hands would be perfect.

He moved closer to her on the deep couch, resting one of his hands on her shoulder, caressing her cheek with the other. "You're a remarkable girl, Anne Ferrar. Do you know that?"

"Ummm..." She made soft cat-sounds and snuggled close to him, her warm bosom pressing into his chest. She was waiting for him to kiss her.

His right hand moved along her shoulder to the soft column of her neck. Idly he ran his fingers along the satiny skin. Now he brought up his left hand—slowly, so slowly, to join the first.

Her eyes were closed, her head back, waiting.

The raging darkness swept up in the mind of Willard Broun. And a voice from that darkness spoke to him. *Go ahead,* the voice commanded, *let your fingers close.*

Both of his hands rested lightly on her slender white neck. He brought his two thumbs into position, still caressing the skin hypnotically with his fingers.

Go on, whispered the voice. *Now!*

The strong hands of Willard Broun began to tighten...

And fell away.

Anne Ferrar was crying.

"Why—what's wrong?" he

asked, puzzled and shaken.

"I—I'm sorry, Frank, but I can't. I just can't go on with this."

"What do you mean?"

"It's just that—that I can't let you make love to me." She looked up at him, tears in her eyes. "If we made love now—tonight, it would be—well, it would be all wrong. It would be something cheap and dirty and I don't want it to be that way with us, Frank. I'm sorry. I don't know what made me come here, to your apartment, because I swear I've never done anything like this before in my life. But—the drinks, and the heat, and the cab ride—and your being so nice to me and—"

Her head dropped into her hands and she sobbed quietly.

Willard Broun felt the darkness drain away; his fingers relaxed.

"You—you *do* understand, don't you? Don't you?"

"Yes, Anne," he said slowly. "I do."

It had begun to rain once more when they reached the street in front of the hotel. He helped her into the cab, pressed the door shut, and took her hand through the half open window.

"I feel—like a little fool," she said.

"You shouldn't," he told her. "You did the right thing, Anne." He kissed her lips, still cool with the misting rain and he felt, suddenly, a comfort he had never known.

"You have my address and my phone," she said. "Will you call me soon, Frank?"

"Soon," he replied. "We'll be seeing each other often, I promise."

He signalled the driver and the cab moved off, its tires hissing on the wet street. Anne's pale face, framed in the car's rear window, grew smaller, vanishing finally into the darkness.

He stood there at the curb for a long moment, watching the crimson dots of the tail lights melt away and die; then he turned back to the hotel lobby, his shoulders hunched against the cold rain.

The girl was standing just beyond the entrance, the overhead neon glinting on the red of her hair.

"Remember me," she said, "from the bar?"

"Yes," said Willard Broun, moving toward her, breathing deeply, "I remember you."

—Continued from Back Cover

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